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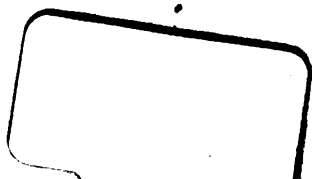
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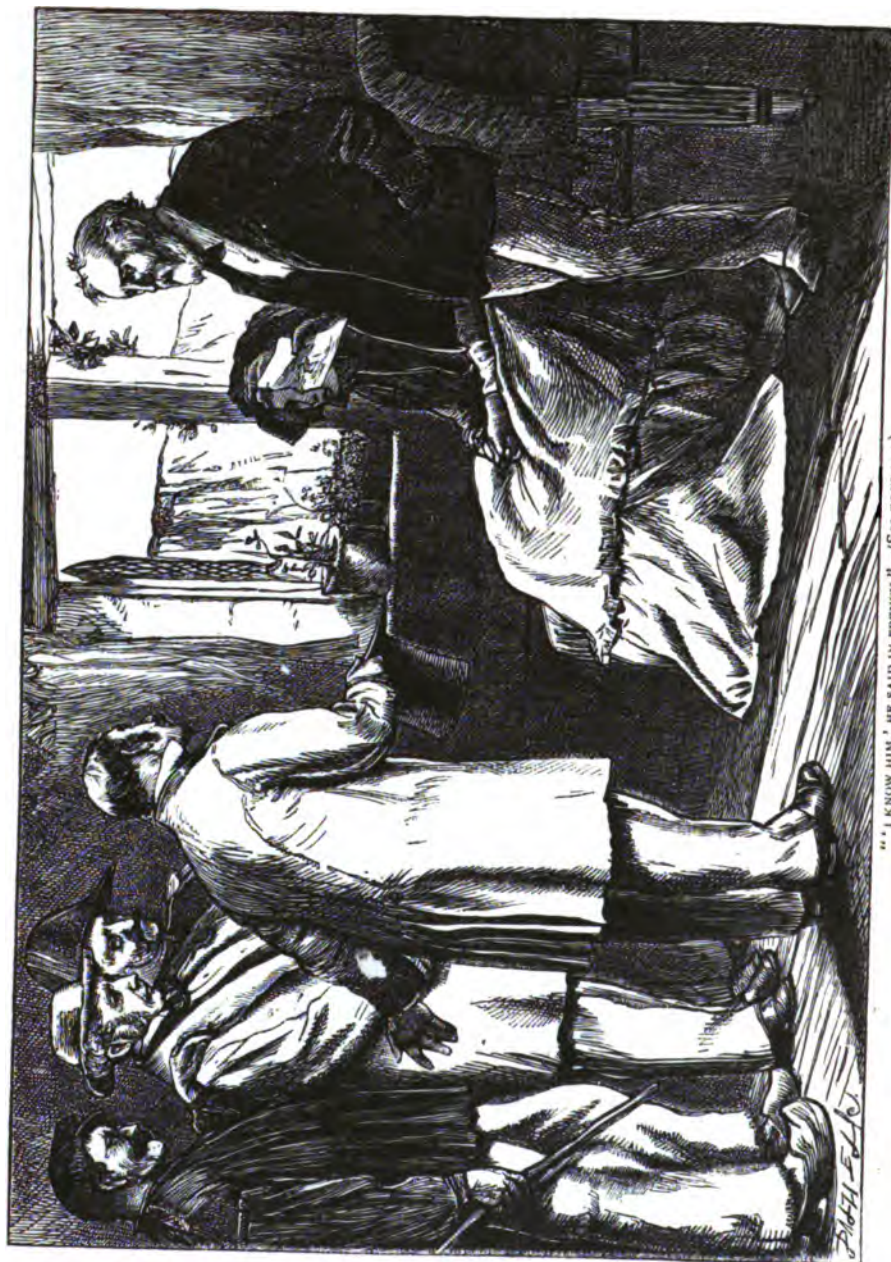
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M. M. Minn bull

Dec. 25, 1890

for mother



"I KNOW HIM," HE SAID IN FRENCH. "— (See page 225.)

AT HIS GATES.

A NOVEL.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF "CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD," "JOHN," "LAIRD OF NORLAW," "MISS MARJORIBANKS,"
"PERPETUAL CURATE," ETC., ETC.

WITH THIRTY-ONE ILLUSTRATIONS.



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AT HIS GATES.

By MRS. OLIPHANT.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.



R. and Mrs. Robert Drummond lived in a pretty house in the Kensington district; a house, the very external aspect of which informed the passer-by who they were, or at least what the husband was. The house was

embowered in its little garden; and in spring, with its lilacs and laburnums, looked like a great bouquet of bloom—as such houses often do. But built out from the house, and occupying a large slice of the garden at the side, was a long room, lighted with sky windows, and not by any means charming to look at outside, though the creepers, which had not long been planted, were beginning to climb upon the walls. It was connected with the house by a passage which acted as a conservatory, and was full of flowers; and everything had been done that could be done to render the new studio as beautiful in aspect as it was in meaning. But it was new, and had scarcely yet begun, as its proprietor said, to “compose” with its surroundings. Robert Drummond, accordingly, was a painter, a painter producing, in the meantime, pictures of the class called *genre*; but intending to be historical, and to take to the highest school of art as soon as life and fame would permit. He was a very good painter; his subjects were truly “felt” and exquisitely manipulated; but there was no energy of emotion, no originality of genius about them. A great many people admired them very much; other painters lingered over them lovingly, with that true professional admiration of “good work” which counteracts the jealousy of trade in every honest mind. They were very saleable articles, indeed, and had procured a considerable amount

of prosperity for the young painter. It was almost certain that he would be made an Associate at the next vacancy, and an Academician in time. But with all this, he was well aware that he was no genius, and so was his wife.

The knowledge of this fact acted upon them in very different ways; but that its effect may be fully understood, the difference in their characters and training requires to be known. Robert Drummond had never been anything but a painter; attempts had been made in his youth to fix him to business, his father having been the senior clerk, much respected and utterly respectable, of a great City house; and the attempt might have been successful but that accident had thrown him among artists, a kind of society very captivating to a young man, especially when he has a certain command of a pencil. He threw himself into art, accordingly, with all his soul. He was the sort of man who would have thrown himself into anything with all his soul; not for success or reward, but out of an infinite satisfaction in doing good work, and seeing beautiful things grow under his hand. He was of a very sanguine mind, a mind which seldom accepted defeat, but which, with instinctive unconscious wisdom, hesitated to dare the highest flights, and to put itself in conflict with those final powers which either vanquish a man or assure his triumph. Perhaps it was because there was some hidden possibility of wild despair and downfall in the man's mind, of which only himself was aware, that he was thus cautious of putting his final fortune to the touch. But the fact was that he painted his pictures contentedly, conscientiously, doing everything well, and satisfied with the perfection of his work as work, though he was not unaware of the absence from it of any spark of divinity. He did not say it in so many words, but the sentiment of his mind was this:—“It is good work, work no man need be ashamed of. I am not a Raphael, alas! and I cannot help it. What is the good of being unhappy about a thing I cannot mend? I am doing my best; it is honest work, which I know I don't slight or do carelessly; and I can give her everything she wants except that. I should be too happy myself if she were but content.” But she was not content, and thus his happiness was brought down to the moderate pitch allowed to mortal bliss.

She was very different from her Robert.

She had been a young lady of very good connections when she first met the rising young artist. I do not say that her connections were splendid, or that she made an absolute *mésalliance*, for that would be untrue. Her people, however, had been rich people for several generations. They had begun in merchandise, and by merchandise they had kept themselves up; but to have been rich from the time of your great-grandfather, with never any downfall or even break in the wealth, has perhaps more effect on the mind than that pride which springs from family. Well-descended people are aware that every family now and then gets into trouble, and may even fall into poverty without sacrificing any of its pretensions. But well-off people have not that source of enlightenment. When they cease to be very well off, they lose the great point of eminence on which they have taken their stand; and, consequently, success is more absolutely necessary to them than it is to any other class in the community. Helen Burton besides was very proud, very ambitious, and possessed of that not unusual form of *amour propre* which claims distinction as a right—though she had not anything particular in herself to justify her claim. She had, or believed she had, an utter contempt for that money which was the foundation of her family pride; and she was, at the same time, too well endowed in mind, and too generous in temper, to be able to give herself up sincerely to worship of that rank, which, as their only perpetual superior, tantalizes the imagination of the plebeian rich, and thrusts itself constantly before them. Helen could have married the son of a poor lord, and become the Honourable Mrs. Somebody, with her mother's blessing, had she so willed. But as her will took a totally different direction, she had defied and alienated her mother, who was also a woman of high spirit, and only some seventeen years older than her only child; the consequence was that when Mrs. Burton found herself abandoned and left alone in the world, she married too, as truly out of pique as a girl sometimes does when deserted by her lover; and at her death left everything she had to her husband and the two small babies, one of them younger than Helen's little Norah, whom she left behind. So that a little tragedy, of a kind not much noted by the world, had woven itself around the beginning of her married life. The mother's second marriage had not been a success, but was Helen to blame for that? Nobody said she was, no one around her; but sometimes in the silence of the night, when she alone

was awake, and all her household slept so peacefully—— Robert, good Robert, was not a success either, not such a man as she had hoped. She loved him sincerely, was grateful to him for his love, and for his constant regard to her wishes. But yet, in the depths of her heart,—no, not despised him, the expression is too strong,—but felt a minute shade of indignation mingle in her disappointment with him for not being a great genius. *Why* was he not a Raphael, a Titian? She had married him with the full understanding that he was such, that he would bring her sweet fame and distinction. And why had not he done it? Every time she looked at his pictures she found out the want of inspiration in them. She did not say anything. She was very kind, praising the pretty bits of detail, the wonderful perfection of painting; but Robert felt that he would rather have the President and all the Hanging Committee to pass judgment on his pictures than his wife. Her sense that he had somehow defrauded her by not mounting at once to the very height of his profession, seemed to endow her with a power of judgment a hundred-fold more than was justified by her knowledge of art. She saw the want of any soul in them at the first glance, from under her half-closed eyelids—and it seemed to Robert that in her heart she said: "Another pretty piece of mediocrity, a thing to sell, not to live—with no genius, no genius in it." These were the words Robert seemed to himself to hear, but they were not the real words which, in her heart, Helen uttered. These were rather as follows:—"It is just the same as the last. It is no better, no better. And now everybody says he is at his best. Oh! when his worst begins to come, what will become of us?" But she never said an uncivil word. She praised what she could, and she went her way languidly into the drawing-room. She had come down out of her sphere to give herself to him, and he had not repaid her as she expected. He had given her love—oh, yes; but not fame. She was Mrs. Drummond only; she was not pointed out where she went as the wife of the great painter. "Her husband is an artist" was all that anybody ever said.

The effect of this upon poor Robert, however, was much worse even than it was upon his wife. Some time elapsed, it is true, before he discovered it. It took him even years to make out what it was that shadowed his little household over and diminished its brightness. But gradually a sense of the absence of that sympathetic backing up which a man expects

in his own house, and without which both men and women who have work to do are so apt to pine and faint, stole over him like a chill. When anything was said against his pictures outside, a gloom in his wife's face would show him that worse was thought within. He had no domestic shield from adverse criticism. It was not kept in the outer circle of his mind, but was allowed to penetrate down to his heart, and envelop him in a heavy discouragement. Even applause did not exhilarate him. "*She* does not think I deserve it," was what he would say to himself; and the sense of this criticism which never uttered a word weighed upon the poor fellow's soul. It made his hand unsteady many a day when his work depended on a firm touch—and blurred the colours before his eyes, and dulled his thoughts. Two or three times he made a spasmodic effort to break through his mediocrity, and then the critics (who were very well pleased on the whole with his mediocrity) shook their heads, and warned him against the sensational. But Helen neither approved nor condemned the change. To her it was all alike, always second-rate. She did her very best to applaud, but she could not brighten up into genuine admiration the blank composure in her eyes. What could she do? There was something to be said for her, as well as for him. She could not affect to admire what she felt to be commonplace, Nature had given her a good eye, and intense feeling had strengthened and corrected it. She saw all the weakness, the flatness, with fatal certainty. What, then, could she say? But poor Robert, though he was not a great artist, was the most tender-hearted, amiable, affectionate of men; and this mode of criticism stole the very heart out of him. There is no such want in the world as that want of backing up. It is the secret of weakness and failure, just as strong moral support and sympathy is the very secret of strength. He stood steady and robust to the external eye, painting many pictures every year, getting very tolerable prices, keeping his household very comfortable, a man still under forty, healthy, cheerful, and vigorous; but all the time he was sapped at the foundations. He had lost his confidence in himself, and it was impossible to predict how he would have borne any sudden blow.

It was about this time that Mr. Reginald Burton, a cousin of Helen's, who had once, it was supposed, desired to be something nearer to her, found out the house in Kensington, and began to pay them visits. The

circumstances of her marriage had separated her from her own people. The elder among them had thought Helen unkind to her mother; the younger ones had felt that nothing had come of it to justify so romantic a story. So that when Reginald Burton met the pair in society it was the reopening of an altogether closed chapter of her life. Mr. Burton was a man in the City in very extensive business. He was chairman of ever so many boards, and his name, at the head of one company or another, was never out of the newspapers. He had married since his cousin did, and had a very fine place in the country, and was more well off still than it was natural for the Burtons to be. Helen, who had never liked him very much, and had not even been grateful to him for loving her, received his visits now without enthusiasm; but Drummond, who was open-hearted like his kind, and who had no sort of jealousy about "*Helen's friends*," received him with a cordiality which seemed to his wife much too effusive. She would not accept the invitation which Mrs. Burton sent to pay a long visit to Dura, their country place; but she could not be less than civil to her cousin when he insisted upon calling, nor could she openly resist when he carried off her husband to City dinners, or unfolded to him the benefits of this or that new society. Drummond had done very well in his profession, notwithstanding Helen's dissatisfaction with his work; and also notwithstanding her dissatisfaction, she was a good housewife, doing her duty wisely. She had a hundred a year of her own, which Drummond had taken care to have settled upon herself; but since they had grown richer he had insisted upon letting this accumulate as "*a portion for Norah*," and the two had laid by something besides. For painter-folk it will be readily seen they were at the very height of comfort—a pretty house, one pretty child, a little reserve of money, slowly but pleasantly accumulating. And money, though it is an ignoble thing, has so much to do with happiness! Drummond, who had been quite content to think that there was a portion saving up for Norah, and to whom it had not occurred that his little capital could be made use of, and produce twenty and an hundredfold, gradually grew interested, without being aware of it, in the proceedings of Mr. Burton. He began to talk, half laughingly half with intention, of the wonderful difference between the slowly-earned gains of labour and those dazzling results of speculation. "*These fellows seem simply to coin money*," he said, "*half in jest*

and whole in earnest ;" "everything they touch seems to become gold. It looks incredible——"and he wound up with a nervous laugh in which there was some agitation. Helen had all a woman's conservatism on this point.

"It is incredible, you may be sure," she said. "How can they invent money? Some one will have to pay for it somewhere;" which was a sentence of profound wisdom, much deeper than she thought.

"So one would say," said Drummond, still laughing; "but nobody seems to suffer. By Jove! as much as—not to say I, who am one of the rank and file—but as Welby or Hartwell Home get for one of their best pictures, your cousin will clear in five minutes, without taking the slightest trouble. When one sees it, one feels hugely tempted"—he added, looking at her. He was one of those men who like to carry their people's sympathy with them. He wanted not acquiescence simply, but approval; and, notwithstanding that he was very well used to the absence of it, sought it still. She would not—could not, perhaps—enter warmly into the subject of his pictures; but here was a new matter. He looked up at her with a certain longing—ready, poor fellow, to plunge into anything if she would but approve.

"I hope you won't let yourself be tempted to anything, Robert, that you don't see the end of," she said; but so gently that her husband's heart rose.

"Trust me for that," he said joyously, "and you shall have the first fruits, my darling. I have not as fine a house for you as your cousin can give to his wife, but for all that——"

"For all that," she said, laughing, "I would not change with Mrs. Reginald Burton. I am not tempted by the fine house."

"I have thought how we can make this one a great deal better," he said, as he stooped to kiss her before he went out. He looked back upon her fondly as he left the room, and said to himself that if he wished for gain it was for her sake—his beautiful Helen! He had painted her furtively over and over again, though she never would sit to him. A certain shadow of her was in all his pictures, showing with more or less distinctness according as he loved or did not love his temporary heroine; but he knew that when this was pointed out to her she did not like it. She was anxious that everybody should know she did not sit to him. She was very indignant at the idea that a painter's wife might serve her husband as a model. "Why should a painter's profession,

which ought to be one of the noblest in the world, be obtruded upon the outer world at every step?" she said. But yet as he was a painter, every inch of him, his eye caught the *pose* of her head as she moved, and made a mental note of it. And yet she was not, strictly speaking, a beautiful woman. She was not the large Juno, who is our present type of beauty; she was not blazing with colour—red, and white, and golden—like the Rubens-heroines of the studio; nor was she of the low-browed, sleepy-eyed, sensuous, classic type. She was rather colourless on the contrary. Her hair was olive-brown, which is so harmonious with a pale complexion; her eyes hazel-grey; her colour evanescent, coming and going, and rarely at any time more than a rose tint; her very lips, though beautifully formed, were only rose—not scarlet—and her figure was slight and deficient in "grand curves." Her great characteristic was what the French call *distinction*; a quality to which in point of truth she had no claim—for Helen, it must be remembered, was no long-descended lady. She was the produce of three generations of money, and a race which could be called nothing but Philistine; and from whence came her high-bred look, her fanciful pride, her unrealisable ambition it would be difficult to say.

She went over the house with a little sigh after Robert was gone, professedly in the ordinary way of a housewife's duty, but really with reference to his last words. Yes, the house might be made a great deal better. The drawing-room was a very pretty one—quite enough for all their wants—but the dining-room was occupied by Drummond as his studio, according to an arrangement very common among painters. This, it will be perceived, was before the day of the new studio. The dining-room was thus occupied, and a smaller room, such as in most suburban houses is appropriated generally to the often scanty books of the family, was the eating-room of the Drummonds. It was one of those things which made Helen's pride wince—a very petty subject for pride, you will say—but, then, pride is not above petty things; and it wounded her to be obliged to say apologetically to her cousin—"The real dining-room of the house is Mr. Drummond's studio. We content ourselves with this in the meantime." "Oh, yes; I see; of course he must want space and light," Reginald Burton had replied with patronising complacency, and a recollection of his own banquetting-hall at Dura. How Helen hated him at that moment, and how much aggravated

she felt with poor Robert smiling opposite to her, and feeling quite comfortable on the subject! "We painters are troublesome things," he even said, as if it was a thing to smile at. Helen went and looked in at the studio on this particular morning, and made a rapid calculation how it could be "made better." It would have to be improved off the face of the earth, in the first place, as a studio; and then carpeted, and tabled, and mirrored, and ornamented to suit its new destination. It would take a good deal of money to do it, but that was not the first consideration. The thing was, where was Robert to go? She, for her part, would have been reconciled to it easily, could he have made up his mind to have a studio apart from the house, and come home when his work was done. That would be an advantage in every way. It would secure that in the evening, at least, his profession should be banished. He would have to spend the evening as gentlemen usually do, yawning his head off if he pleased, but not professional for ever. It would no longer be possible for him to put on an old coat, and steal away into that atmosphere of paint, and moon over his effects, as he loved to do now. He liked Helen to go with him, and she did so often, and was tried almost beyond her strength by his affectionate lingerings over the canvas which, in her soul, she felt would never be any better, and his appeals to her to suggest and to approve. Nothing would teach him not to appeal to her. Though he divined what she felt, though it had eaten into his very life, yet still he would try again. Perhaps this time she might like it better—perhaps—

"If he would only have his studio out of doors," Helen reflected. She was too sure of him to be checked by the thought that his heart might perhaps learn to live out of doors too as well as his pictures, did she succeed in driving them out. No such doubt ever crossed her mind. He loved her, and nobody else, she knew. His mind had never admitted another idea but hers. She was a woman who would have scorned to be jealous in any circumstances—but she had no temptation to be jealous. He was only a moderate painter. He would never be as splendid as Titian, with a prince to pick up his pencil—which was what Helen's semi-Philistine pride would have prized. But he loved her so as no man had ever surpassed. She knew that, and was vaguely pleased by it; yet not as she might have been had there ever been any doubt about the matter. She was utterly sure of him, and it did not excite her one way

or another. But his words had put a little gentle agitation in her mind. She put down her calculation on paper when she went back to the drawing-room after her morning occupations were over, and called Norah to her music. Sideboard so much, old carved oak, to please him, though for herself she thought it gloomy; curtains, for these luxuries he had not admitted to spoil his light; a much larger carpet—she made her list with some pleasure while Norah played her scales. And that was the day on which the painter's commercial career began.

CHAPTER II.

DRUMMOND'S first speculations were very successful, as is so often the case with the innocent and ignorant dabbler in commercial gambling. Mr. Burton instructed him what to do with his little capital, and he did it. He knew nothing about business, and was docile to the point of servility to his disinterested friend, who smiled at his two thousand pounds, and regarded it with amused condescension. Two thousand pounds! It meant comfort, ease of mind, moral strength, to Drummond. It made him feel that in the contingency of a bad year, or a long illness, or any of the perils to which men and artists are liable, he would still be safe, and that his wife and child would not suffer; but to the rich City man it was a bagatelle scarcely worth thinking of. When he really consented to employ his mind about it, he made such use of it as astonished and delighted the innocent painter. All that his simple imagination had ever dreamed seemed likely to be carried out. This was indeed money-making he felt—Trade spelt with a very big capital, and meaning something much more splendid than anything he had hitherto dreamt of. But then he could not have done it by himself or without instruction. Burton could not have been more at a loss in Drummond's studio than he would have felt in his friend's counting-house. Mr. Burton was "a merchant;" a vague term which nevertheless satisfied the painter's mind. He was understood to be one of the partners in Rivers's bank, but his own business was quite independent of that. Money was the material he dealt in—his stock-in-trade. He understood the Funds as a doctor understands the patient whose pulse he feels every day. He could divine when they were going to rise and when they were going to fall. And there were other ways in which his knowledge told still more wonderfully. He knew when a new invention, a new manufacture, was going to be popular,

by some extraordinary magic which Drummond could not understand. He would catch a speculation of this sort at its tide, and take his profit from it, and bound off again uninjured before the current began to fall. In all these matters he was knowing beyond most men; and he lent to his cousin's husband all the benefit of his experience. For several years Drummond went on adding to his store in a manner so simple and delightful, that his old way of making money, the mode by which months of labour went to the acquisition of a few hundred pounds, looked almost laughable to him. He continued it because he was fond of his art, and loved her for herself alone; but he did it with a sort of banter, smiling at the folly of it, as an enlightened old lady might look at her spinning-wheel. The use of it? Well, as for that, the new ways of spinning were better and cheaper; but still not for the use, but for the pleasure of it!—So Drummond clung to his profession, and worked almost as hard at it as ever. And in the additional ease of his circumstances, not needing to hurry anything for an exhibition, or sacrifice any part of his design for the fancy of a buyer, he certainly painted better than usual, and was made an Associate, to the general satisfaction of his brethren. These were the happy days in which the studio was built. It was connected with the house, as I have said, by a conservatory, a warm, glass-covered, fragrant, balmy place, bright with flowers. "There must always be violets, and there must always be colour!" he had said to the nurseryman who supplied and kept his fairy palace in order, after the fashion of London. And if ever there was a flowery way contrived into the thorny haunts of Art it was this. It would perhaps be rash to say that this was the happy time of Drummond's married life, for they had always been happy, with only that one drawback of Helen's dissatisfaction with her husband's work. They had loved each other always, and their union had been most true and full. But the effect of wealth was mollifying, as it so often is. Prosperity has been railed at much, as dangerous and deadening to the higher being; but prosperity increases amiability and smooths down asperities as nothing else can. It did not remove that one undisclosed and untellable grievance which prevented Mrs. Drummond's life from attaining perfection, but it took away ever so many little points of irritation which aggravated that. She got, for one thing, the dining-room she wanted—a prosaic matter, yet one which Helen considered im-

portant—and she got, what she had not bargained for, that pretty conservatory, and a bunch of violets every day—a lover-like gift which pleased her. Things, in short, went very well with them at this period of their existence. Her discontents were more lulled to sleep than they had ever been before. She still saw the absence of any divine meaning in her husband's pictures; but she saw it with gentler eyes. The pictures did not seem so entirely his sole standing-ground. If he could not grow absolutely illustrious by that or any personal means of acquiring fame, he might still hold his own in the world by other means. Helen sighed over her Titian-dream, but to a great extent she gave it up. Greatness was not to be; but comfort, and even luxury were probable. Her old conditions of life seemed to be coming back to her. It was not what she had dreamed of; but yet it was better to have mediocrity with ease and modest riches, and pleasant surroundings, than mediocrity without those alleviations. To do her justice, had her husband been a great unsuccessful genius, in whom she had thoroughly believed, she would have borne privation proudly and with a certain triumph. But that not being so, she returned to her old starting-ground with a sigh that was not altogether painful, saying to herself that she must learn to be content with what she had, and not long for what she could not have.

Thus they were happier, more hopeful, more at their ease. They went more into society, and received more frequent visits from their friends. The new studio made many social pleasures possible that had not been possible. Of itself it implied a certain rise in the world. It gave grace and completeness to their little house. Nobody could say any longer that it was half a house and half a workshop, as Helen, under her breath, in her impatience, had sometimes declared it to be. The workshop phase was over, the era of self-denial gone—and yet Robert was not driven from the art he loved, nor prevented from putting on his old coat and stealing away in the evenings to visit the mistress who was dearer to him than anything else except his wife.

This was the state of affairs when the painter one day entered Helen's drawing-room in a state of considerable excitement. He was full of a new scheme, greater than anything he had as yet been engaged in. Rivers's bank, which was half as old as London, which held as high repute as the Bank of England, which was the favourite depository of everybody's money, from ministers of state

down to dressmakers, was going to undergo a revolution. The Riverses themselves had all died out, except, indeed, the head of the house, who was now Lord Rivers, and had no more than a nominal connection with the establishment which had been the means of bringing him to his present high estate. The other partners had gradually got immersed in other business. Mr. Burton, for instance, confessed frankly that he had not time to attend to the affairs of the bank, and the others were in a similar condition:—they had come in as secondaries, and they found themselves principals, and it was too much for them. They had accordingly decided to make Rivers's a joint-stock bank. This was the great news that Drummond brought home to his wife. "I will put everything we have into it," he said in his enthusiasm, "unless you object, Helen. We can never have such another chance. Most speculations have a doubtful element in them; but this is not at all doubtful. There is an enormous business ready made to our hands, and all the traditions of success, and the best names in the City to head our list—for of course the old partners hold shares, and will be made directors of the new company— And—you will laugh, Helen, but for you and the child I feel able to brave anything—I am to be a director too."

"You!" cried Helen, with a surprise which had some mixture of dismay. "But you don't know anything about business. You can't even—"

"Reckon up my own accounts," said the painter placidly—"quite true; but you see it is a great deal easier to calculate on a large scale than on a small scale. I assure you I understand the banking system—at least, I shall when I have given my mind to it. I shouldn't mind even," he said, laughing, "making an effort to learn the multiplication table. Norah might teach me. Besides, to speak seriously, it doesn't matter in the least: there are clerks and a manager to do all that, and other directors that know all about it, and I shall learn in time."

"But, then, why be a director at all?" said Helen. She said this more from a woman's natural hesitation at the thought of change, than from any dislike of the idea; for she belonged to the race from which directors come by nature. Poor Drummond could not give any very good reason why he desired this distinction; but he looked very wise, and set before her with gravity all the privileges involved.

"It brings something in," he said, "either in the way of salary, or special profits, or

something. Ask your cousin. I don't pretend to know very much about it. But I assure you he is very great upon the advantages involved. He says it will be the making of me. It gives position and influence and all that—"

"To a painter!" said Helen: and in her heart she groaned. Her dream came back like a mist, and wove itself about her head. What distinction would it have given to Raphael or to Titian, or even to Gainsborough or Sir Joshua Reynolds, to be made directors of a bank? She groaned in her heart, and then she came back to herself, and caught her husband's eyes looking at her with that grieved and wondering look, half aware of the disappointment he had caused her, humbled, sorry, suspicious, yet almost indignant, the look with which he had sometimes regarded her from among his pictures in the day when art reigned alone over his life. Helen came abruptly to herself when she met that glance, and said hurriedly, "It cannot change your position much, Robert, in our world."

"No," he said, with a glance of sudden brightness in his eyes which she did not understand; "but, my darling, our world may expand. I should like you to be something more than a poor painter's wife, Helen—you who might be a princess! I should not have ventured to marry you if I had not hoped to make you a kind of princess; but you don't believe I can; do you?" Here he paused, and, she thought, regarded her with a wistful look, asking her to contradict him. But how could she contradict him? It was true. The wife of a pleasant mediocre painter, Associate, or in time Academician—that was all. Not a thorough lady of art such as—such as— Such as whom? Poor Andrea's Lucrezia, who ruined him? That was the only painter's wife that occurred to Helen.

"Dear Robert," she said earnestly, "never mind me: so long as I have you and Norah, I care very little about princesses. We are very well and very happy as we are. I think you should be careful, and consider well before you make any change."

But by this time the brightness that had been hanging about him came back again like a gleam of sunshine. He kissed her with a joyous laugh. "You are only a woman," he said, "after all. You don't understand what it is to be a British director. Fancy marching into the bank with a lordly stride, and remembering the days when one was thankful to have a balance of five pounds to one's credit! You don't see the fun of it, Helen; and the best of the whole is that an

R.A. on the board of directors will be an advantage, Burton says. Why, heaven knows. I suppose he thinks it will conciliate the profession. We painters, you see, are known to have so much money floating about! But, any how, he thinks an R.A.—"

"But, Robert! you are not an R.A."

"Not yet. I forgot to tell you," he added, lowering his voice, and putting on a sudden look of gravity, which was half real, half innocently hypocritical. "Old Welby died last night."

Then there was a little pause. They were not glad that old Welby was dead. A serious shade came over both their faces for the moment—the homage, partly natural, partly conventional, that human nature pays to death. And then they clasped each other's hands in mutual congratulation. The vacant place would come to Drummond in the course of nature. He was known to be the first on the list of Associates. Thus he had obtained the highest honours of his profession, and it was this and not the bank directorship which had filled him with triumph. His wife's coldness, however, checked his delight. His profession and the public adjudged the honour to him; but Helen had not adjudged it. If the prize had been hers to bestow, she would not have given it to him. This made his heart contract even in the moment of his triumph. But yet he was triumphant. To him it was the highest honour in the world.

"Poor old Welby!" he said. "He was a great painter; and now that he is dead, he will be better understood. He was fifty before he entered the Academy," the painter continued, with half-conscious self-glorification. "He was a long time making his way."

"And you are more than ten years younger," said Helen. Surely that might have changed her opinion if anything could. "Robert, are you to be put upon this bank because you are an R.A.?"

"And for my business talents generally," he said, with a laugh. His spirits were too high to be subdued. He would not hear reason, nor, indeed, anything except the confused delightful chatter of his new elevation, in which the fumes of happiness get vent. He plunged into an immediate revelation of what he would do in his new capacity. "It will be odd if one can't make the Hanging Committee a little more reasonable," he said. "I shall set my face against that hideous habit of filling up 'the line' with dozens of pictures because the men have R.A. at

their names. Do you remember, Helen, that year when I was hung up at the ceiling? It nearly broke my heart. It was the year before we were married."

"They were your enemies then," said Helen, with some visionary remnant of the old indignation which she had felt about that base outrage before she was Robert Drummond's wife. She had not begun to criticise him then—to weigh his pictures and find them wanting; and she could still remember her disgust and hatred of the Hanging Committee of that year. Now no Hanging Committee could do any harm. It had changed its opinion and applauded the painter, but she—had changed her opinion too. Then this artist-pair did as many such people do. By way of celebrating the occasion they went away to the country, and spent the rest of the day like a pair of lovers. Little Norah, who was too small to be carried off on such short notice, was left at home with her governess, but the father and mother went away to enjoy the bright summer day, and each other, and the event which had crowned them with glory. Even Helen's heart was moved with a certain thrill of satisfaction when it occurred to her that some one was pointing her husband out as "Drummond the painter—the new R.A." He had won his blue ribbon, and won it honestly, and nobody in England, nobody in the world was above him in his own profession. He was as good as a Duke, or even superior, for a Duke (poor wretch!) cannot help himself, whereas a painter achieves his own distinction. Helen let this new softness steal into her soul. She even felt that when she looked at the pictures next time they would have a light in them which she had not yet been able to perceive. And the bank, though it was so much more important, sank altogether into the background, while the two rowed down the river in the summer evening, with a golden cloud of pleasure and glory around them. They had gone to Richmond, where so many happy people go to realise their gladness. And were the pair of lovers new betrothed, who crossed their path now and then without seeing them, more blessed than the elder pair? "I wonder if they will be as happy ten years hence?" Helen said, smiling at them with that mingling of sweet regret and superiority with which we gaze at the reflection of a happiness we have had in our day. "Yes," said the painter, "if she is as sweet to him as my wife has been to me." What more could a woman want to make her glad? If Helen had not been very happy in his love, it would have

made her heart sick to think of all her failures towards him; but she was very happy; and happiness is indulgent not only to its friends, but even to itself.

CHAPTER III.

MR. BURTON, however, was soon restored to pre-eminence in the affairs of the Drummonds. The very next day he dined with them, and entered on the whole question. The glory which the painter had

achieved was his own affair, and consequently its interest was soon exhausted to his friend, who, for his part, had a subject of his own, of which the interest was inexhaustible. Mr. Burton was very explanatory, in his genial, mercantile way. He made it clear even to Helen, who was not above the level of ordinary womankind in her understanding of business. He had no difficulty in convincing her that Robert Drummond, R.A., would be an addition to the list of directors; but it was harder to make the reasons apparent



See page 13.

why "Rivers's" should change its character. If it was so firmly established, so profitable, and so popular, why should the partners desire to share their good fortune with others? Mrs. Drummond asked. Her husband laughed with the confidence of a man who knew all about it, at the simplicity of such a question, but Mr. Burton, on the contrary, took the greatest pains to explain all. He pointed out to her all the advantages of "new blood." The bank was doing well, and making enormous profits; but still it might do better with more energetic management. Mr. Burton described and deplored pathetically his

own over-burdened condition. Sometimes he was detained in the city while the guests at a state dinner-party awaited him at home. His carriage had waited for him for two hours together at the railway, while he was busy in town, toiling over the arrears of work at Rivers's. "We have a jewel of a manager," he said, "or we never could get on at all. You know Golden, Drummond? There never was such a fellow for work—and a head as clear as steel; never forgets anything; never lets an opportunity slip him. But for him, we never could have got on so long in this way. But every man's strength

has its limits. And we must have 'new blood.'

Thus Helen gradually came to an understanding of the whole, or at least thought she did. At all events, she understood about the "new blood." Her own Robert was new blood of the most valuable kind. His name would be important, for the business of "Rivers's" was to a considerable extent a private business. And his good sense and industry would be important too.

"Talk about business talent," Mr. Burton said; "business talent means good sense and prudence. It means the capacity to see what ought to be done, and the spirit to do it; and if you add to this discretion enough not to go too far, you have everything a man of business needs. Of course all technical knowledge has to be acquired, but that is easily done."

"But is Robert so accomplished as all this?" Helen said, opening her eyes. She would not for all England, have disclosed to her cousin that Robert, in her eyes, was any thing less than perfect. She would not, for her life, have had him know that her husband was not the first of painters and of men; but yet an exclamation of wonder burst from her. She was not herself so sure of his clear-sightedness and discretion. And when Robert laughed with a mixture of vanity and amusement at the high character imagined for him, Helen flushed also with something between anger and shame.

"Your own profession is a different thing," she said hastily. "You have been trained for that. But to be an R.A. does not make you a man of business—and painting is your profession, Robert. More will be expected from you now, instead of less."

"But we are not going to interfere with his time, my dear Helen," said her cousin cheerfully. "A meeting of directors once a week or so—a consultation when we meet—his advice, which we can always come to ask. Bless my soul, we are not going to sweep up a great painter for our small concern. No, no; you may make yourself quite easy. In the meantime Drummond is not to give us much more than the benefit of his name."

"And all his money," Helen said to herself as she withdrew to the drawing-room, where her little Norah awaited her. His money had increased considerably since this new era in their lives began. It was something worth having now—something that would make the little girl a heiress in a humble way. And he was going to risk it

all. She went into the conservatory in the twilight and walked up and down and pondered—wondering if it was wise to do it; wondering if some new danger was about to swallow them up. Her reasonings, however, were wholly founded upon matters quite distinct from the real question. She discussed it with herself, just as her husband would discuss it with himself, in a way common to women, and painters, and other unbusiness-like persons, on every ground but the real one. First, he had followed Reginald Burton's advice in all his speculations, and had gained. Would it be honourable for him to give up following his advice now, especially in a matter which he had so much at heart? Secondly, by every means in his power, Reginald Burton took occasion to throw in *her* face (Helen's) the glories and splendour of his wife, and of the home he had given her, and all her high estate. Helen herself was conscious of having refused these glories and advantages. She had chosen to be Robert Drummond's wife, and thrown aside the other; but still the mention of Mrs. Burton and her luxuries had a certain stinging and stimulating effect upon her. She scorned, and yet would have been pleased to emulate that splendour. The account of it put her out of patience with her own humility, notwithstanding that she took pride in that humility, and felt it more consistent with the real dignity of her position than any splendour. And then, thirdly, the thought would come in that even the magic title of R.A. had not thrown any celestial light into Robert's pictures. That very morning she had stood for half an hour, while he was out, in front of the last, which still stood on his easel, and tried to reason herself into love of it. It was a picture which ought to have been great. It was Francesca and Paolo, in the story, reading together at the crisis of their fate. The glow and ardour of suppressed passion had somehow toned down in Drummond's hands to a gentle light. There was a sunset warmth of colour about the pair, which stood in place of that fiercer illumination; and all the maze of love and madness, all the passion and misery and delight, all the terror of fate involved, and shadow of the dark, awful world beyond, had sunk into a tender picture of a pair of lovers, innocent and sweet. Helen had stood before it with a mixture of discouragement and longing impossible to put into words. Oh, if she could but breathe upon it, and breathe in the lacking soul! Oh, if she could but reflect into Drummond's eyes the passion of

humiliation and impatience and love which was in her own! But she could not. As Helen paced up and down the pretty ornamented space, all sweet with flowers, which her husband's love had made for her, this picture rose before her like a ghost. He who painted it was an R.A. It was exquisitely painted—a very miracle of colour and manipulation. There was not a detail which could be improved, nor a line which was out of drawing. He would never do anything better, never, never! Then why should he go on trying, proving, over and over, how much he could, and how much he could not do? Better, far better, to throw it aside for ever, to grow rich, to make himself a name in another way.

Thus Helen reasoned in the vehemence of her thoughts. She was calm until she came to this point. She thought she was very calm, reasonable to the highest pitch, in everything; and yet the blood began to boil and course through her veins as she pursued the subject. Sometimes she walked as far as the door of the studio, and pausing to look in, saw that picture glimmering on the easel, and all the unframed canvases about upon the walls. Many of them were sketches of herself, made from memory, for she never would sit—studies of her in her different dresses, in different characters, according as her husband's fond fancy represented her to himself. She could not see them for the darkness, but she saw them all in her heart. Was that all he could do? Not glorify her by his greatness, but render her the feeble homage of this perpetual, ineffectual adoration. Why was not he like the other painters; like—Her memory failed her for an example; of all the great painters she could think of only Rubens' bacchanalian beauties, and that Lucrezia would come to her mind. It was about the time of Mr. Browning's poem, that revelation of Andrea del Sarto, which elucidates the man like a very ray from heaven. She was not very fond of poetry, nor anything of a critic; but the poem had seized upon her, partly because of her intense feeling on the subject. Sometimes she felt as if she herself was Andrea—not Robert, for Robert had none of that heart-rending sense of failure. Was she Lucrezia rather, the wife that goaded him into misery? No, no! she could not so condemn herself. When her thoughts reached this point she forsook the studio and the conservatory, and rushed back to the drawing-room, where little Norah, with her head pressed close against the window to take advantage of the last glimmer of light, was

reading a book of fairy tales. Great painters had not wives. Those others—Leonardo, and Angelo, and the young Urbinese—had none of them wives. Was that the reason? But not to be as great as Michel Angelo, not to win the highest honours of art, would Robert give up his wife and his child. Therefore was it not best that he should give up being a painter, and become a commercial man instead, and grow rich! Helen sat down in the gathering darkness and looked at the three windows glimmering with their mist of white curtains, and little Norah curled up on the carpet, with her white face and her brown curls relieved against the light. Some faint sounds came in, soft as summer and evening made them, through the long casement, which was open, and with it a scent of mignonette, and of the fresh earth in the flower-beds, refreshed by watering and dew. Sometimes the voices of her husband and cousin from the adjoining room would reach her ear; but where she was all was silent, nothing to disturb her thoughts. No, he would never do better. He had won his crown, Helen was proud and glad that he had won it; but in her heart did not consent. He had won and he had not won. His victory was because he had caught the *vassal* fancy of the public, and pleased his brethren by his beautiful work; but he had failed because—because—Why had he failed? Because he was not Raphael or Leonardo—nor even that poor Andrea—but only Robert Drummond, painting his pictures not out of any inspiration within him, but for money and fame. He had gained these as men who seek them frankly so often seem to do. But it was better, far better, that he should make money now, by legitimate means, without pursuing a profession in which he never could be great.

These were not like a wife's reasonings; but they were Helen's, though she was loyal to her husband as ever woman was. She would have liked so much better to worship his works and himself, as most women do; and that would have done him good more than anything else in earth or heaven. But she could not. It was her hard fate that made her eye so keen and so true. It felt like infidelity to him, to come to such a conclusion in his own house, with his kind voice sounding in her ear. But so it was, and she could not make it different, do what she would. He was so pleased when he found she did not oppose his desires, so grateful to her, so strongly convinced that she was yielding her own pleasure to his, that his

thanks were both lavish and tender. When their visitor had left them, and they were alone, he poured out his gratitude like a lover. "I know you are giving in to me," he said, "my love, my self-forgetting Helen! It is like you. You always have given up your pleasure to mine. Am I a brute to accept it, and take my own way?"

"I am not making any sacrifice, Robert. Don't thank me, please. It is because I think you have judged right, and this is best."

"And you think I am so blind and stupid not to see why you say that," he said in his enthusiasm. "Helen, I often wonder what providence was thinking of to give you only such a poor fellow as I am. I wish I was something better for your sake, something more like you; but I have not a wish or a hope in the world, my darling, except for you. If I want to be rich, Helen, it is only for you. You know that, at least."

"And for Norah," she said, smiling.

"For Norah, but most for Norah's mother, who trusted me when I was nobody, and gave me herself when I had little chance of being either rich or great," said Drummond. He said it, poor fellow, with a swelling of his heart. His new dignity had for the moment delivered him even from the chill of his wife's unexpressed indifference to his work. With a certain trustful simplicity, which it would have been impossible to call vanity, he accepted the verdict of his profession—even though he had doubts himself as to his own eminence, they must know. He had won the greatness he wanted most, he had acquired a distinction which could not but vanquish his own doubts and hers. And as he was now, he would not change positions with any man in England. He was great, and please God, for Helen's sake, he would be rich too. He put his arm round his wife and drew her into the open conservatory. The moon was up, and shone down upon them, lighting up with a wan and spiritual light the colourless silent flowers. It was curious to see them, with all their leaves silvered, and all their identity gone, yet pouring forth their sweet scents silently, no one noting them. "How sweet it is here," said the painter, drawing a long breath in his happiness. It was a moment that lived in his mind, and remained with him, as moments do which are specially happy, detaching themselves from the common tenor of life with all the more distinctness that they are so few.

"Yes, it is the place I love best," said

Helen, whose heart was touched too, "because you made it for me, Robert. The rest is ordinary and comfortable, but this is different. It is your sonnet to me, like that we were reading of—like Raphael's sonnet and Dante's angel." This she said with a little soft enthusiasm, which perhaps went beyond the magnitude of the fact. But then she was compunctious about her sins towards him; and his fondness, and the moonlight, and the breath of the flowers, moved her, and the celestial fumes of Mr. Browning's book of poetry had gone to Helen's head, as the other influences went to her heart.

"My darling! it will be hard upon me if I don't give you better yet," he said. And then with a change in his voice—cheerful, yet slightly deprecating, "Come and have a look at 'Francesca,'" he said.

It was taking an unfair advantage of her; but she could not refuse him at such a moment. He went back to the drawing-room for the lamp, and returned carrying it, drawing flecks of colour round him from all the flowers as he passed flashing the light on them. Helen felt her own portrait look at her reproachfully as she went in with reluctant steps following him, wondering what she could say. It made her heart sick to look at his pet picture, in its beauty and feebleness; but he approached it lovingly, with a heart full of satisfaction and content. He held up the lamp in his hand, though it was heavy, that the softened light might fall just where it ought, and indicated to her the very spot where she ought to stand to have the full advantage of all its beauties. "I don't think there is much to find fault with in the composition," he said, looking at it fondly. "Give me your honest opinion, Helen. Do you think it would be improved by a little heightening of those lights?"

Helen gazed at it with confused eyes and an aching heart. It was his diploma picture, the one by which most probably he would be known best to posterity, and she said to herself that he, a painter, ought to know better than she did. But that reflection did not affect her feelings. Her impulse was to snatch the lamp from his hand, and say, "Dear Robert, dearest husband, come and make money, come and be a banker, or sweep a crossing, and let Francesca alone for ever!" But she could not say that. What she did say faltering was—"You must know so much better than I do, Robert; but I think the light is very sweet. It is best not to be too bright."

"Do you think so?" he said anxiously.

"I am not quite sure. I think it would be more effective with a higher tone just here; and this line of drapery is a little stiff—just a little stiff. Could you hold the lamp for a moment, Helen? There! that is better. Now Paolo's foot is free, and the attitude more distinct. Follow the line of the chalk and tell me what you think. That comes better now?"

"Yes, it is better," said Helen; and then she paused and summoned all her courage. "Don't you think," she faltered, "that Francesca—is—almost too innocent and sweet?"

"Too innocent!" said poor Robert, opening his honest eyes. "But, dear, you forget! She was innocent. Why, surely you are not the one to go in for anything sensational, Helen! This is not Francesca in the Inferno, but Francesca in the garden, before any harm had come near her. I don't like your impassioned women." He had grown a little excited, feeling, perhaps, more in the suggestion than its mere words; but now he came to a stop, and his voice regained its easy tone. "The whole thing wants a great deal of working up," he said; "all this foreground is very imperfect—it is too like an English garden. I acknowledge my weakness; my ideal always smacks of home."

Helen said no more. How could she? He was ready laughingly to allow that England came gliding into his pencil and his thoughts when he meant to paint Italy: a venial, kindly error. But candid and kind as he was, he could not bear criticism on the more vital points. She held the lamp for him patiently, though it strained her arm, and tried to make what small suggestions she could about the foreground; and in her heart, as she stood trembling with pain and excitement, would have liked to thrust the flame through that canvas in very love for the painter. Perhaps some painter's wife who reads this page, some author's wife, some woman jealous and hungry for excellence in the productions of those she loves, will understand better than I can describe it how Helen felt.

When he had finished those fond scratches of chalk upon the picture, and had taken the lamp from her hand to relieve her, Drummond was shocked to find his wife so tremulous and pale. He made her sit down in his great chair, and called himself a brute for tiring her. "Now let us have a comfortable talk over the other matter," he said. The lamp, which he had placed on a table littered with portfolios and pigments, threw a dim light through the large studio.

There were two ghostly easels standing up tall and dim in the background, and the lay figure ghostliest of all, draped with a gleaming silvery stuff, pale green with lines of silver, shone eerily in the distance. Drummond sat down by his wife, and took her hand in his.

"You are quite chilly," he said tenderly; "are you ill, Helen? If it worries you like this, a hundred directorships would not tempt me. Tell me frankly, my darling—do you dislike it so much as this?"

"I don't dislike it at all," she said eagerly. "I am chilly because the night is cold. Listen how the wind is rising! That sound always makes me miserable. It is like a child crying, or some one wailing out of doors. It affects my nerves—I don't know why."

"It is nothing but the sound of rain," he said, "silly little woman! I wonder why it is that one likes a woman to be silly now and then? It restores the balance between us, I suppose; for generally, alas! Helen, you are wiser than I am, which is a dreadful confession for a man to make."

"No, no, it is not true," she said with indescribable remorse. But he only laughed and put his arm round her, seeing that she trembled still.

"It is quite true; but I like you to be silly now and then—like this. It gives one a glimmer of superiority. There! lean upon me and feel comfortable. You are only a woman after all. You want your husband's arm to keep you safe."

"What is that?" said Helen with a start. It was a simple sound enough; one of the many unframed, unfinished drawings which covered the walls had fallen down. Robert rose and picked it up, and brought it forward to the light.

"It is nothing," he said; and then with a laugh, looking at it, added, "*Absit omen!* It is my own portrait. And very lucky, too, that it was nothing more important. It is not hurt. Let us talk about the bank."

"Oh, Robert, your portrait!" she said with sudden unreasonable terror, clutching at it, and gazing anxiously into the serene painted face.

"My portrait does not mind in the least," he said, laughing; "and it might have been yours, Helen. I must have all those fastenings seen to to-morrow. Now, let us talk about the bank."

"Oh, Robert," she said, "let us have nothing to do with it. It is an omen, a warning. We are very well as we are. Give

up all these business things which you don't understand. How can you understand them? Give it up, and let us be as we are."

"Because a nail has come out of the wall?" he said. "Do you suppose the nail knew, Helen, or the bit of painted canvas? Nonsense, dear. I defy all omens for my part."

And just then the wind rose and gave a wailing cry, like a spirit in pain. Helen burst into tears which she could not keep back. No; it was quite true, the picture could not know, the wind could not know what was to come. And yet——

Drummond had never seen his wife suffer

from nerves or fancies, and it half-amused, half-affected him, and went to his heart. He was even pleased, the simple-minded soul, and flattered by the sense of protection and strength which he felt in himself. He liked nothing better than to caress and soothe her. He took her back to the drawing-room and placed her on a sofa, and read the new book of poetry to her which she had taken such a fancy to. Dear foolishness of womankind! He liked to feel her thus dependent upon his succour and sympathy; and smiled to think of any omen that could lie in the howling of a wind, or the rising of a summer storm.



PART II

CHAPTER IV.



left one trace behind. While he was soothing her fanciful terrors, Robert had said, in a burst of candour and magnanimity, "I will tell you what I will do, Helen. I will not act on my own judgment. I'll ask Haldane and Maurice for their advice." "But I do not care for their advice," she had said, with a certain pathos. "Yes, to be sure," Robert had answered; for, good as he was, he liked his own way, and sometimes was perverse. "They are my oldest friends; they are the most sensible fellows I know. I will tell them all the circumstances, and they will give me their advice."

This was a result which probably would have come whether Helen had been nervous or not; for Haldane and Maurice were the two authorities whom the painter held highest after his wife. But Helen had never been able to receive them with her husband's faith, or to agree to them as sharers of her influence over him. It said much for her that she had so tolerated them and schooled herself in their presence that poor Drummond had no idea of the rebellion which existed against them in her heart. But both of them were instinctively aware of it, and felt that they were not loved by their friend's wife. He made the same announcement to her next morning with cheerful confidence, and a sense that he deserved nothing but applause for his prudence. "I am going to keep my pro-

T is needless to say that Helen's superstition about the fall of the picture and the sighing of the wind vanished with the night, and that in the morning her nervousness was gone, and her mind had returned to its previous train of thought. Her passing weakness, however, had

mise," he said. "You must not think I say anything to please you which I don't mean to carry out. I am going to speak to Haldane and Maurice. Maurice is very knowing about business, and as for Stephen, his father was in an office all his life."

"But, Robert, I don't want you to ask their advice. I have no faith in them. I would rather a hundred times you judged for yourself."

"Yes, my darling," said Robert; "they are the greatest helps to a man in making such a decision. I know my own opinion, and I know yours; and our two good friends, who have no bias, will put everything right."

And he went out with his hat brushed and a new pair of gloves, cheerful and respectable as if he were already a bank director, cleansed of the velvet coats and brigand hats and all the weaknesses of his youth. And his wife sat down with an impatient sigh to hear Norah play her scales, which was not exhilarating, for Norah's notions of time and harmony were as yet but weakly developed. While the child made direful havoc among the black notes, Helen was sounding a great many notes quite as black in her inmost mind. What could they know about it? What were they to him in comparison with herself? Why should he so wear his heart upon his sleeve? It raised a kind of silent exasperation within her, so good as he was, so kind, and tender, and loving; and yet this was a matter in which she had nothing to do but submit.

These two cherished friends of Robert's were not men after Helen's heart. The first, Stephen Haldane, was a Dissenting minister, a member of a class which all her prejudices were in arms against. It was not that she cared for his religious opinions or views, which differed from her own. She was not theological nor ecclesiastical in her turn of mind, and, to tell the truth, was not given to judging her acquaintances by an intellectual standard, much less a doctrinal one. But she shrank from his intimacy because he was a Dissenter—a man belonging to a class not acknowledged in society, and of whom she understood vaguely that they were very careless about their h's, and were not gentlemen. The fact that Stephen Haldane was a gentleman as much as good manners, and good looks, and a tolerable education could

make him, did not change her sentiments. She was too much of an idealist (without knowing it) to let proof invalidate theory. Accordingly, she doubted his good manners, mistrusted his opinions, and behaved towards him with studied civility, and a protest, carefully veiled but never forgotten, against his admission to her society. He had no right to be there; he was an intruder, an inferior. Such was her conclusion in a social point of view; and her husband's inclination to consult him on most important matters in their history was very galling to her. The two had come to know each other in their youth, when Haldane was going through the curious incoherent education which often leads, a young man temporarily to the position of dissenting minister. He had started in life as a Bluecoat boy, and had shown what people call "great talent," but not in the academical way. As a young man he had loved modern literature better than ancient. Had he been born to an estate of ten thousand a year, or had he been born in a rank which would have secured him diplomatic or official work, he would have had a high character for accomplishments and ability; but he was born only of a poor dissenting family, without a sixpence, and when his school career was over he did not know what to do with himself. He took to writing, as such men do, by nature, and worked his way into the newspapers. Thus he began to earn a little money, while vaguely playing with a variety of careers. Once he thought he would be a doctor, and it was while in attendance at an anatomical class that he met Drummond. But Haldane was soon sick of doctoring. Then he became a lecturer, getting engagements from mechanics' institutions and literary societies, chiefly in the country. It was at one of these lectures that he fell under the notice of a certain Mr. Baldwin, a kind of lay bishop in a great dissenting community. Mr. Baldwin was much "struck" by the young lecturer. He agreed with his views, and applauded his eloquence; and when the lecture was over had himself introduced to the speaker. This good man had a great many peculiarities, and was rich enough to be permitted to indulge them. One of these peculiarities was an inclination to find out and encourage "rising talent." And he told everybody he had seldom been so much impressed as by the talents of this young man, who was living (innocently) by his wits, and did not know what to do with himself. It is not necessary to describe the steps by which young Haldane

ripened from a lecturer upon miscellaneous subjects, literary and philosophical, into a most esteemed preacher. He pursued his studies for a year or two at Mr. Baldwin's cost, and at the end of that time was promoted, not of course nominally, but very really, by Mr. Baldwin's influence, to the pulpit of the flourishing and wealthy congregation of which that potentate was the head.

This was Stephen Haldane's history; but he was not the sort of man to be produced naturally by such a training. He was full of natural refinement, strangely blended with a contented adherence to all the homely habits of his early life. He had not attempted, had not even thought of, "bettering" himself. He lived with his mother and sister, two homely dissenting women; narrow as the little house they lived in, who kept him, his table, and surroundings, on exactly the same model as his father's house had been kept. All the luxuries of the wealthy chape' folks never tempted him to imitation. He did not even claim to himself the luxury of a private study in which to write his sermons, but had his writing-table in the common sitting-room, in order that his womankind might preserve the cold fiction of a "best room" in which to receive visitors. To be sure, he might have been able to afford a larger house; but then Mrs. Haldane and Miss Jane would have been out of place in a larger house. They lived in Victoria Villas, one of those smaller streets which copy and vulgarize the better ones in all London suburbs. It was close to St. Mary's Road, in which Drummond's house was situated, and the one set of houses was a copy of the other in little. The arrangement of the rooms, the shape of the garden, the outside aspect was the same, only so many degrees smaller. And this, it must be allowed, was one of the reasons why the Haldanes were unpalatable neighbours to Mrs. Drummond. For, as a general rule, the people who lived in St. Mary's Road did not know the inferior persons who inhabited Victoria Villas. The smaller copied the greater, and were despised by them in consequence. It was "a different class," everybody said. And it may be supposed that it was very hard upon poor Helen to have it known that her husband's closest friend, the man whose opinion he asked about most things, and whom he believed in entirely, was one who combined in himself almost all the objectionable qualities possible. He was a Dissenter—a dissenting minister—sprung of a poor family, and ad-

hering to all their shabby habits—and lived in Victoria Villas. The very address of itself was enough to condemn a man; no one who had any respect for his friends would have retained it for an hour. Yet it was this man whom Robert had gone to consult at the greatest crisis of his life.

The other friend upon whom poor Drummond relied was less objectionable in a social point of view. He was a physician, and not in very great practice, being a crotchety man given to inventions and investigations, but emphatically "a gentleman" according to Helen's own sense of the word. This was so far satisfactory; but if he was less objectionable, he was also much less interesting than Stephen Haldane. He was a shy man, knowing little about women and caring less. He lived all by himself in a great house in one of the streets near Berkeley Square, a house twice as big as the Drummonds', which he inhabited in solitary state, in what seemed to Helen the coldest, dreariest loneliness. She was half sorry for, half contemptuous of him in his big, solemn, doubly-respectable hermitage. He was rich, and had nothing to do with his money. He had few friends and no relations. He was as unlike the painter as could be conceived; and yet in him too Robert believed. Their acquaintance dated back to the same anatomical lectures which had brought Haldane and Drummond together, but Dr. Maurice was a lover of art, and had bought Robert's first picture, and thus occupied a different ground with him. Perhaps the irritating influence he had upon Helen was greater than that exercised by Haldane, because it was an irritation produced by his character, not by his circumstances. Haldane paid her a certain shy homage, feeling her to be different from all the women that surrounded himself; but Maurice treated her with formal civility and that kind of conventional deference which old-fashioned people show to the wishes and tastes of an inferior, that he may be set at his ease among them. There were times when she all but hated the doctor, with his courtesy and his silent air of criticism, but the minister she could not hate.

At the same time it must be allowed that to see her husband set out with his new gloves to ask the opinion of these two men, after all the profound thought she had herself given to the subject, and the passionate feeling it had roused within her, was hard upon Helen. To them it would be nothing more than a wise or unwise investment of money, but to her it was a measure affecting life and honour. Perhaps she exaggerated, she was will-

ing to allow—but they would not fail to under-rate its importance; they could not—Heaven forbid they ever should—feel as she did, that Robert, though an R.A., had failed in his profession. They would advise him to hold fast by that profession and leave business alone, which was as much as condemning him to a constant repetition of the despairs and discontents of the past; or they would advise him to accept the one opening held out to him and sever himself from Art, which would be as good as a confession of failure. Thus it is evident, whatever his friends might happen to advise, Helen was prepared to resent.

At this moment Mrs. Drummond's character was the strangest mixture of two kinds of being. She was, though a mature woman, like a flower bursting out of a rough husk. The old conventional nature, the habits and prejudices of the rich *bourgeois* existence to which she had been born, had survived all that had as yet happened to her in life. The want of a dining-room, which has been already noted, had been not a trivial accident but a real humiliation to her. She sighed when she thought of the great dinner-parties with mountains of silver on table and sideboard, and many men in black or more gorgeous beings in livery to wait, which she had been accustomed to in her youth; and when she was obliged to furnish a supper for a group of painters who had been smoking half the night in the studio, and who were not in evening dress, she felt almost disgraced. Robert enjoyed that impromptu festivity more than all the dinner-parties; but Helen felt that if any of her old friends or even the higher class of her present acquaintances were to look in and see her, seated at the head of the table, where half a dozen bearded men in morning coats were devouring cold beef and salad, she must have sunk through the floor in shame and dismay. Robert was strangely, sadly without feeling in such matters. It never occurred to him that they could be a criterion of what his wife called "position;" and he would only laugh in the most hearty way when Helen insisted upon the habits proper to "people of our class." But her pride, such as it was, was terribly wounded by all such irregular proceedings. The middle-class custom of dining early and making a meal of "tea," a custom in full and undisturbed operation round the corner in Victoria Villas, affected her with a certain horror as if it had been a crime. Had she yielded to it she would have felt that she had "given in," and voluntarily descended in the social scale. "Late dinners" were to her as a bulwark

against that social downfall which in her early married life had seemed always imminent. This curious raising up of details into the place of principles had given Helen many an unnecessary prick. It had made her put up with much really inferior society in the shape of people of gentility whose minds were all absorbed in the hard struggle to keep up appearances, and live as people lived with ten times their income, while it cut her off from a great many to whom appearances were less important, and who lived as happened to be most convenient to them, without asking at what hour dukes dined or millionaires. The dukes probably would have been as indifferent, but not the millionaires, and it was from the latter class that Helen came. But in the midst of all these all-important details and the trouble they caused her, had risen up, she knew not how, a passionate, obstinately ideal soul. Perhaps at first her thirst for fame had been but another word for social advancement and distinction in the world, but that feeling had changed by means of the silent anguish which had crept on her as bit by bit she understood her husband's real weakness. Love in her opened, it did not blind, her eyes. Her heart cried out for excellence, for power, for genius in the man she loved; and with this longing there came a hundred subtle sentiments which she did not understand, and which worked and fermented in her without any will of hers. Along with the sense that he was no genius, there rose an unspeakable remorse and hatred of herself who had found it out; and along with her discontent came a sense of her own weakness—a growing humility which was a pain to her, and against which her pride fought stoutly, keeping, up to this time, the upper hand—and a regretful, self-reproachful, half-adoration of her husband and his goodness, produced by the very consciousness that he was not so strong nor so great as she had hoped. These mingled elements of the old and the new in Helen's mind made it hard to understand her, hard to realise and follow her motives; yet they explained the irritability which possessed her, her impatience of any suggestion from outside, along with her longing for something new, some change which might bring a new tide into the life which had fallen into such dreary, stagnant, unreal ways.

While she waited at home with all these thoughts whirling about her, Robert went on cheerfully seeking advice. He did it in the spirit which is habitual to men who consult their friends on any important matter. He

made up his mind first. As he turned lightly round the corner, swinging his cane, instead of wondering what his friend would say to him, he was making up his mind what he himself would do with all the unusual power and wealth which would come to him through the bank. For instance, at once there was poor Chance, the sculptor, whose son he would find a place for without more ado. Poor Chance had ten children, and was no genius, but an honest, good fellow, who would have made quite a superior stonemason had he understood his own gifts. Here was one immediate advantage of that bank-directorship. He went in cheerful and confident in this thought to the little house in Victoria Villas. Haldane had been ill; he had spent the previous winter in Italy, and his friends had been in some anxiety about his health; but he had improved again, and Robert went in without any apprehensions into the sitting-room at the back, which looked into the little garden. He had scarcely opened the door before he saw that something had happened. The writing-table was deserted, and a large sofa drawn near the window had become, it was easy to perceive, the centre of the room and of all the interests of its inhabitants. Mrs. Haldane, a homely old woman in a black dress and a widow's cap, rose hastily as he came in, with her hand extended, as if to forbid his approach. She was very pale and tremulous; the arm which she raised shook as she held it out, and fell down feebly by her side when she saw who it was. "Oh, come in, Mr. Drummond, he will like to see *you*," she said in a whisper. Robert went forward with a pang of alarm. His friend was lying on the sofa with his eyes closed, with an ashy paleness on his face, and the features slightly, very slightly distorted. He was not moved by the sound of Robert's welcome nor by his mother's movements. His eyes were closed, and yet he did not seem to be asleep. His chest heaved regularly and faintly, or the terrified bystander would have thought he was dead.

Robert clutched at the hand which the old lady stretched out to him again. "Has he fainted?" he cried in a whisper. "Have you had the doctor? Let me go for the doctor. Do you know what it is?"

Poor Mrs. Haldane looked down silently and cried. Two tears fell out of her old eyes as if they were full and had overflowed. "I thought he would notice you," she said. "He always was so fond of you." Oh, Mr. Drummond, my boy's had a shock."

"A shock!" said Drummond, under his breath. All his own visions flitted out of his mind like a shadow. His friend lay before him like a fallen tower, motionless, speechless. "Good God!" he said, as men do unawares, with involuntary appeal to Him who (surely) has to do with those wild contradictions of nature. "When did it happen? Who has seen him?" he asked, growing almost as pale as was the sufferer, and feeling faint and ill in the sense of his own powerlessness to help.

"It was last night, late," said the mother. "Oh, Mr. Drummond, this has been what was working on him. I knew it was never the lungs. Not one of us, either his father's family or mine, was ever touched in the lungs. Dr. Mixwell saw him directly. He said not to disturb him, or I would have had him in bed. I know he ought to be in bed."

"I'll go and fetch Maurice," cried Robert. "I shall be back directly," and he rushed out of the room which he had entered so jauntily. As he flew along the street, and jumped into the first cab he could find, the bank and his directorship went as completely out of his mind as if they had been a hundred years off. He dashed at the great solemn door of Dr. Maurice's house when he reached it and rushed in, upsetting the decorous servant. He seized the doctor by the shoulder, who was seated calmly at breakfast. "Come along with me directly," he said. "I have a cab at the door."

"What is the matter?" said Dr. Maurice. He had no idea of being disturbed so unceremoniously. "Is Mrs. Drummond ill? Sit down and tell me what is wrong."

"I can't sit down. I want you to come with me. There is a cab at the door," said Robert panting. "It is poor Haldane. He has had a fit—come at once."

"A fit! I knew that was what it was," said Dr. Maurice calmly. He waved his hand to the importunate petitioner, and swallowed the rest of his breakfast in great mouthfuls. "I'm coming; hold your tongue, Drummond. I knew the lungs was all nonsense—of course that is what it was."

"Come, then," cried Robert. "Good heavens, come! don't let him lie there and die."

"He will not die. More's the pity, poor fellow!" said the doctor. "I said so from the beginning. John, my hat. Lungs, nonsense! He was as sound in the lungs as either you or I."

"For God's sake, come then," said the impatient painter, and he rushed to the door

and pushed the calm physician into his cab. He had come to consult him about something—Yes, to be sure, about poor Haldane. Not to consult him—to carry him off, to compel, to drag that other back from the verge of the grave. If there was anything more in his mind when he started Drummond had clean forgotten it. He did not remember it again till two hours later when, having helped to carry poor Haldane up-stairs, and rushed here and there for medicines and conveniences, he at last went home, weary with excitement and sympathetic pain. "I have surely forgotten something," he said, when he had given an account of all his doings to his wife. "Good heavens! I forgot altogether that I went to ask somebody's advice."

CHAPTER V.

MR. BURTON called next morning to ascertain Drummond's decision, and found that he had been sitting up half the night with Stephen Haldane, and was wholly occupied by his friend's illness. The merchant suffered a little vexation to be visible in his smooth and genial aspect. He was a middle-aged man, with a bland aspect and full development, not fat but ample. He wore his whiskers long, and had an air that was always jovial and comfortable. The cleanness of the man was almost aggressive. He enjoined upon you the fact that he not only had his bath every morning, but that his bath was constructed on the newest principles, with water-pipes which wandered through all the house. He wore buff waistcoats and light trousers, and the easiest of overcoats. His watch-chain was worthy of him, and so were the heavy gold buttons at his sleeves. He looked and moved and spoke like wealth, with a roll in his voice, which is only attainable in business, and when business goes very well with you. Consequently the shade of vexation which came over him was very perceptible. He found the Drummonds only at breakfast, though he had breakfasted two hours before, and this mingled in his seriousness a certain tone of virtuous reproach.

"My dear fellow, I don't want to disturb you," he said; "but how you can make this sort of thing pay I can't tell. I breakfasted at eight; but then, to be sure, I am only a City man, and can't expect my example to be much thought of at the West-end."

"Is this the West-end?" said Robert, laughing. "But if you breakfasted at eight, you must want something more by this time. Sit down and have some coffee. We are

late because we have been up half the night." And he told his new visitor the story of poor Stephen and his sudden illness. Mr. Burton was moderately interested, for he had married Mr. Baldwin's only daughter, and was bound to take a certain interest in his father-in-law's *protégé*. He heard the story to an end with admirable patience, and shook his head, and said, "Poor fellow! I am very sorry for him," with due gravity. But he was soon tired of Stephen's story. He took out his watch, and consulted it seriously, muttering something about his appointments.

"My dear, good people," he said, "it may be all very well for you to spend your time and your emotions on your friends, but a man of business cannot so indulge himself. I thought I should have had a definite answer from you, Drummond, yes or no."

"Yes," said Robert with professional calmness. "I am very sorry. So I intended myself; but this business about poor Haldane put everything else out of my head."

"Well," said Mr. Burton, rising and walking to the fire-place, according to British habit, though there was no fire, "you know best what you can do. I, for my part, should not be able to neglect my business if my best friend was on his death-bed. Of course you understand Rivers's is not likely to go begging for partners. Such an offer is not made to every one. I am certain that you should accept it for your own sake; but if you do not think it of importance, there is not another word to say."

"My dear fellow," cried Robert, "of course I think it of importance; and I know I owe it to your consideration. Don't think me ungrateful, pray."

"As for gratitude, that is neither here nor there," said the merchant; "there is nothing to be grateful about. But we have a meeting to-day to arrange the preliminaries, and probably everything will be settled then. I should have liked to place your name at once on the list. To leave such things over, unless you mean simply to abandon them, is a great mistake."

"I am sure I don't see any particular reason why we should leave it over," Robert said, faltering a little; and then he looked at his wife. Helen's face was clouded and very pale. She was watching him with a certain furtive eagerness, but she did not meet his eye. There was a tremulous pause, which seemed like an hour to both of them, during the passing of which the air seemed to rattle and beat about Helen's ears. Her husband gazed at her, eagerly questioning her; but

she could not raise her eyes—something prevented her, she could not tell what; her eyelids seemed heavy and weighed them down. It was not weakness or fear or a desire to avoid the responsibility of immediate action, but a positive physical inability. He looked at her for, perhaps, a full minute by the clock, and then he said slowly, "I see no reason to delay. I think Helen and I are agreed. This matter put the other out of my head; but it is natural you should be impatient. I think I will accept your kind offer, Burton, without any more delay."

How easy it is to say such words! The moment they were spoken, Robert felt them so simple, so inevitable, and knew that all along he had meant to say them. But still he was somewhat excited; a curious feeling came into his mind, such as a king may feel when he has crossed his neighbour's frontier with an invading army. Half a dozen steps were enough to do it; but how to get back again? and what might pass before the going back! The thought caught at his breath, and gave him a tremulous thrill through all his frame.

"Very well," said Mr. Burton, withdrawing his hands from under his coat-tails, and drawing a slightly long breath, which the other in his excitement did not observe. Mr. Burton did not show any excitement, except that long breath, which, after all, might have been accidental; no sign or indication of feeling had been visible in him. It was a great, a very great, matter to the Drummonds; but it was a small matter to one who had been for years a partner in Rivers's. "Very well. I will submit your name to the directors to-day. I don't think you need fear that the result will be doubtful. And I am very glad you have come to such a wise decision. Helen, when your husband is rich, as I trust he soon will be, I hope you will fancy a little house at Dura, and be our neighbour. It would be like old times. I should like it more than I can say."

"I never was fond of Dura," said Helen, with some abruptness. This reference to his greatness irritated her, as it always did; for whatever newcomer might take a little house at Dura, he was the lord of the place, supreme in the great house, and master of everything. Such an allusion always stirred up what was worst in her, and gave to her natural pride a certain tone of spitefulness and envy, which disgusted and wounded herself. But it did not wound her cousin, it pleased him. He laughed with a suppressed enjoyment and triumph.

"Well," he said, "Dura is my home, and

a very happy one, therefore, of course, I am fond of it. And it has a great many associations too, some of them, perhaps, not so agreeable. But it is always pleasant to feel, as I do, that everything that has happened to one has been for the best."

"The conversation has taken a highly edifying tone," said Robert with some surprise. He saw there was more meant than met the eye, but he did not know what it was. "We shall all be thanking Providence next, as people do chiefly, I observe, in celebration of the sufferings of others. Well, since you think I am on the fair way to be rich, perhaps I had better thank Providence by anticipation. Must I go with you to-day?"

"Not to-day. You will have full intimation when your presence is wanted. You forget—nothing is settled yet," said Mr. Burton; "the whole arrangement may come to nothing yet, for what I know. But I must be going; remember me to poor Haldane when he is able to receive good wishes. I hope he'll soon be better. Some of these days I'll call and see him. Good morning, Helen. Good-bye, Drummond. I'm glad you've made up your mind. My conviction is, it will turn out the best day's work you ever did in your life."

"Is he true, I wonder?" Helen said to herself as the two men left the room, and stood talking intently in the hall. It was the first time the idea had crossed her mind, and now it took its origin more from the malicious shaft her cousin had shot at herself than from any indication of double-dealing she had seen in him. It was against all the traditions of the Burtons to imagine that he could be anything but true. They had been business people as long as they had been anything, and commercial honour had been their god. It went against her to imagine that "a relation of mine!" could be other than perfect in this particular; and she sighed, and dismissed the idea from her mind, blaming herself, as she often did now, for ill-temper and suspiciousness. "It was mean to make that allusion to the past, but it is meaner of me to doubt him on that account," she said to herself, with a painful sigh. It was so hard in her to overcome nature, and subdue those rebellious feelings that rose in her unawares. "Why should I care?" she thought, "it is my vanity. I suppose if the man had never got over my rejection of him I should have been pleased. I should have thought better of him! Such a man as that! After all, we women must be fools indeed." This was the

edifying sentiment in her mind when Robert came back.

"Well, Helen, the die is cast," he said, half cheerfully, half sadly. "However we come to shore, the ship has set out. If it were not for poor Stephen I should make to-day a holiday and take you somewhere. This day ought to be distinguished from the rest."

"I hope he is true. I wonder if he is true?" Helen repeated to herself, half unconsciously, beneath her breath.

"Whom? Your cousin!" said Robert, with quite two notes of admiration in his tone. "Why, Helen, what a cynic you are growing. You will suspect me next."

"Am I a cynic?" she said, looking up at him with a sudden tear in her eye. "It is because I am beginning to be so wretchedly doubtful about myself."

This admission burst from her she could not tell how. She had no intention of making it. And she was sorry the moment the words were said. But as for Robert, he gazed at her first in consternation, then laughed, then took her in his kind arms with that vituperation of love which is more telling than any eulogy. "Yes," he said, "you are a very suspicious character altogether, you know so much harm of yourself that it is evident you must think badly of others. What a terrible business for me to have such a wife!"

Thus ended the episode in their lives which was to colour them to their very end, and decide everything else. They had been very solemn about it at the beginning, and had made up their minds to proceed very warily, and ask everybody's advice; but, as so often happens in human affairs, the decision which was intended to be done so seriously had been accomplished in a moment, without consideration, almost without thought. And, being done, it was a weight off the minds of both. They had no longer this disturbing matter between them to be discussed and thought over. Robert dismissed it out of simple light-heartedness, and that delightful economy of sensation which is fortunately so common among the artist class: "It is done, and all the thinking in the world will not make any difference. Why should I bother myself about it?" If this *insouciance* sometimes does harm, heaven knows it does a great deal of good sometimes, and gives the artist power to work where a man who felt his anxieties more heavily would fail. Helen had not this happy temper; but she was a woman more occupied with personal feelings than with any fact, however impor-

tant. The fact was outside, and never, she thought, could vanquish her—her enemies were within.

Time passed very quietly after this great decision. There was a lull, during which Stephen Haldane grew better, and Mrs. Drummond learned to feel a certain friendliness and sympathy for the lonely mother and sister, who were flattered by her inquiries after him. She came even to understand her husband's jokes about Miss Jane, the grim and practical person who ruled the little house in Victoria Villas—whom she even laughed at, but whom little Norah took a violent fancy for, which much mollified her mother. And then, in the matter of Rivers's bank, there began to rise a certain agreeable excitement and importance in their life. "Drummond among the lists of bank directors! *Drummond!* What does it mean?" This question ran through all the studios, and came back in amusing colours to the two who knew all about it. "His wife belongs to that sort of people, and has hosts of business connections," said one. "The fellow is rich," said another: "don't you know what a favourite he is with all the dealers, and has been for ever so long?" "His wife has money," was the judgment of a third. "Take my word for it, that is the way to get on in this world. A rich wife keeps you going till you've made a hit—if you are ever going to make a hit—and helps you on." "It is all that cousin of hers," another would say, "that fellow Burton whom one meets there. He bought my last picture, so I have reason to know, and has a palace in the country, like the rest of those City fellows." "What luck some men have," sighed the oldest of all. "I am older than Drummond, but none of these good things ever came my way." And this man was a better painter than Drummond, and knew it, but somehow had never caught the tide. Drummond's importance rose with every new report. When he secured the clerkship for Bob Chance, Chance, the sculptor's son, he made one family happy, and roused a certain excitement in many others; for poor artists, like poor clergymen and other needy persons, insist upon having large families. Two or three of the men who were Robert's contemporaries, who had studied with him in the schools, or had guided his early labours, went to see him, while others wrote, describing promising boys who would soon be ready for business, and for whom they would gladly secure something less precarious than the life of art. These applications were from the second class of artists, the men who are

never very successful, yet who "keep on," as they themselves would say, rambling from exhibition to exhibition, painting as well as a man can be taught to paint who has no natural impulse, or turning out in conscientious marble fair limbs of nymphs that ought, as the only reason for their being, to have sprung ethereal from the stone. And these poor painters and sculptors were often so good, so kindly, and unblamable as men; fond of their families, ready to do anything to push on the sons and daughters who showed "talent," or had any means offered of bettering themselves. How gladly Robert would have given away a dozen clerkships! how happy it would have made him to scatter upon them all some share of his prosperity! but he could not do this, and it was the first disagreeable accompaniment of his new position. He had other applications, however, of a different kind. Those in the profession who had some money to invest came and asked for his advice, feeling that they could have confidence in him. "Rivers's has a name like the Bank of England," they said; and he had the privilege of some preference shares to allot to them. All this advanced him in his own opinion, in his wife's, in that of all the world. He was no longer a man subject to utter demolition at the hands of an ill-natured critic; but a man endowed with large powers in addition to his genius, whom nobody could demolish or even seriously harm.

Perhaps, however, the greatest height of Drummond's triumph was reached when, the year having crept round from summer to autumn, his friend Dr. Maurice came to call one evening after a visit to Haldane. It was that moment between the two lights which is dear to all busy people. The first fire of the year was lit in Helen's drawing-room, which of itself was a little family event. Robert had strayed in from the studio in his painting coat, which he concealed by sitting in the shade by the side of the chimney. The autumn evenings had been growing wistful and eerie for some time back, the days shortening, yet the season still too warm for fires—so that the warm interior, all lit by the kindly, fitful flame, was a novelty and a pleasure. The central figure in the picture was Norah, in a thick white piqué frock, with her brown hair falling on her shoulders, reading by the firelight. The little white figure rose from the warm carpet into the warm, rosy firelight, herself less vividly tinted, a curious little abstract thing, the centre of the life around her, yet taking no

note of it. She had shielded one of her cheeks with her hands, and was bending her brows over the open book, trying to shade the light which flickered and danced, and made the words dance too before her. The book was too big for her, filling her lap and one crimsoned arm which held its least heavy side. The newcomer saw nothing but Norah against the light as he came in. He stopped, in reality because he was fond of Norah, with a disapproving word:

"At it again!" he said. "That child will

ruin her eyesight and her complexion, and I don't know what besides."

"Never fear," said Drummond, with a laugh, out of the corner, revealing himself, and Helen rose from the other side. She had been invisible too in a shady corner. A certain curious sensation came over the man who was older, richer, and felt himself wiser, than the painter. All this Drummond had for his share, though he had not done much to deserve it—whereas in the big library near Berkeley Square there was no fire, no



See page 24.

child pushing a round shoulder out of her frock, and roasting her cheeks, no gracious woman rising softly out of the shadows. Of course, Dr. Maurice might have been married too, and had not chosen; but nevertheless it was hard to keep from a momentary envy of the painter who could come home to enjoy himself between the lights, and for whom every night a new pose arranged itself of that child reading before the fire. Dr. Maurice was a determined old bachelor, and thought more of the child than of the wife.

"Haldane is better to-day," he said, seat-

ing himself behind Norah, who looked up dreamily, with hungry eyes possessed by her tale, to greet him, at her mother's bidding. "Nearly as well as he will ever be. We must amuse him with hopes of restoration, I suppose; but he will never budge out of that house as long as he lives."

"But he will live?" said Robert.

"Yes, if you can call it living. Fancy, Drummond! a man about your own age, a year or two younger than I am—a man fond of wandering, fond of movement; and yet shut up in that dreary prison—for life."

A silence fell upon them all as he spoke.

They were too much awed to make any response, the solemnity being beyond words. Norah woke up at the pause. Their voices did not disturb her; but the silence did.

"Who is to be in the dreary prison?" she said, looking round upon them with her big brown wondering eyes.

"Hush! Poor Mr. Haldane, dear," said the mother, under her breath.

Then Norah burst into a great cry. "Oh, who has done it—who has done it? It is a shame—it is a sin! He is so good!"

"My child," said the doctor, with something like a sob, "it is God who has done it. If it had been a man, we would have throttled him before he touched poor Stephen. Now, heaven help us! what can we do? I suppose it is God."

"Maurice, don't speak so before the child," said Robert from a corner.

"How can I help it?" he cried. "If it was a man's doing, what could we say bad enough? Norah, little one, you don't know what I mean. Go back to your book."

"Norah, go up-stairs and get dressed for dinner," said Helen. "But you cannot, you must not be right, doctor. Oh, say you are sometimes deceived! Things happen that you don't reckon on. It is not for his life?"

Dr. Maurice shook his head. He looked after Norah regretfully as she went out of the room with the big book clasped in her arms.

"You might have let the child stay," he said reproachfully. "There was nothing that could have disturbed her in what I said."

And then for a moment or two the sound of the fire flickering its light about, making sudden leaps and sudden downfalls like a living thing, was the only sound heard; and it was in this pensive silence, weighted and subdued by the neighbourhood of suffering, that the visitor suddenly introduced a subject so different. He said abruptly—

"I have to congratulate you on becoming a great man, Drummond. I don't know how you have done it. But this bank, I suppose, will make your fortune. I want to venture a little in it on my own account."

"You, Maurice? My dear fellow!" said Robert, getting up with sudden enthusiasm, and seizing his friend by both his hands, "you are going in for Rivers's! I never was so glad in my life!"

"You need not be violent," said the doctor. "Have I said anything very clever, Mrs. Drummond? I am going in for Rivers's, because it seems such a capital investment. I can't expect, of course, to get put on the

board of directors, or to sit at the receipt of custom, like such a great man as you are. Don't shake my hands off, my good fellow. What is there wonderful in this?"

"Nothing wonderful," said Robert; "but the best joke I ever heard in my life. Fancy, Helen, how I was going to him humbly, hat in hand, to ask his advice, thinking perhaps he would put his veto on it, and prevent me from making my fortune. And now he is a shareholder like the rest. You may not see it: but it is the best joke! You must stay to dinner, old fellow, and we will talk business all the evening. Helen, we cannot let him go to-night."

And Helen smiled too as she repeated her husband's invitation. Robert had been wiser than his friends, though he had asked nobody's advice but hers. It was a salve to her often-wounded pride. The doctor did not like it half so much. His friend had stolen a march upon him, reversed their usual positions, gone first, and left the other to follow. He stayed to dinner, however, all the same, and pared apples for Norah, and talked over Rivers's afterwards over his wine. But when he left the door to go home, he shrugged his shoulders with a half-satisfied prophecy. "He will never paint another good picture," Maurice said, with a certain tone of friendly vengeance. "When wealth comes in, good-bye to art."

CHAPTER VI.

It was on an October day, mellow and bright, when Robert Drummond, with a smile on his face, and a heavy heart in his breast, reached the house in Victoria Villas, to superintend poor Stephen's return to the sitting-room, as he had superintended his removal to his bed. The sitting-room was larger, airier, and less isolated, than the mournful chamber up-stairs, in which he had spent half the summer. It was a heart-rending office, and yet it was one from which his friend could not shrink. Before he went up-stairs the painter paused, and took hold of Miss Jane's hand, and wept, as people say, "like a child;" but a child's hot thunder-shower of easily-dried tears are little like those few heavy drops that come to the eyes of older people, concentrating in themselves so much that words could not express. Miss Jane, for her part, did not weep. Her gray countenance, which was grayer than ever, was for a moment convulsed, and then she pushed her brother's friend away. "Don't you see I daren't cry?" she cried, almost angrily, with one hard sob. Her brother

Stephen was the one object of her life. All the romance of which she was capable, and a devotion deeper than that of twenty lovers, was in her worship of him. And this was what it was coming to! She hurried into the room which she had been preparing for him, which was henceforward to be his dwelling day and night, and shut the door upon the too sympathetic face. As for Robert, he went into his friend's little chamber with cheery salutations: "Well, old fellow, so you are coming back to the world!" he said. Poor Haldane was seated in his dressing-gown in an easy-chair. To look at him, no chance spectator would have known that he was as incapable of moving out of it as if he had been bound with iron, and everybody about him had been loud in their congratulations on the progress he was making. They thought they deceived him, as people so often think who flatter the incurable with hopes of recovery. He smiled as Robert spoke, and shook his head.

"I am changing my prison," he said; "nothing more. I know that as well as the wisest of you, Drummond. You kind, dear souls, do you think those cheery looks you have made such work to keep up, deceive me?"

"What cheery looks? I am as sulky as a bear," said Robert. "And as for your prison, Maurice doesn't think so. You heard what he said?"

"Maurice doesn't say so," said poor Haldane. "But never mind, it can't last for ever; and we need not be doleful for that."

The painter groaned within himself as they moved the helpless man down-stairs. "It will last for ever," he thought. He was so full of life and consolation himself that he could not realise the end which his friend was thinking of—the "for ever" which would release him and every prisoner. When they carried the invalid into the room below he gave a wistful look round him. For life—that was what he was thinking. He looked at the poor walls and commonplace surroundings, and a sigh burst from his lips. But he said immediately, to obliterate the impression of the sigh, "What a cheerful room it is, and the sun shining! I could not have had a more hopeful day for my first coming down-stairs."

And then they all looked at each other, heart-struck by what seemed to them the success of their deception. Old Mrs. Haldane fell into a sudden outburst of weeping: "Oh, my poor boy! my poor boy!" she said; and again a quick convulsion passed over

Miss Jane's face. Even Dr. Maurice, the arch-deceiver, felt his voice choked in his throat. They did not know that their patient was smiling at them and their transparent devices, in the sadness and patience of his heart. The room had been altered in many particulars for his reception, and fitted with contrivances, every one of which contradicted the promises of restoration which were held out to him. He had known it was so, but yet the sight of all the provisions made for his captivity gave him a new pang. He could have cried out, too, to earth and heaven. But what would have been the good? At the end all must submit.

"Now that you are comfortable, Stephen," said his sister, with a harsh rattle in her voice, which made her appear less amiable than ever, and in reality came out of the deep anguish of her heart, "there is some one waiting to see you. The chapel people have been very kind. Besides the deputation that came with the purse for you, there are always private members asking how you are, and if they can see you, and how they miss you—till you are able to go back."

"That will be never, Jane."

"How do you know? How can any one tell? It is impious to limit God's mercies," cried Miss Jane harshly; then, suddenly calming down, "It is Mr. Baldwin's son-in-law who has called to-day. They are in the country, and this Mr. Burton has come to carry them news of you. May he come in?"

"That is your cousin—your director?" said the invalid with some eagerness. "I should like to see him. I want you to invest my money for me, Drummond. There is not much; but you must have it, and make something of it in your new bank."

Mr. Burton came in before Drummond could answer. He came in on tiptoe, with an amount of caution which exasperated all the bystanders who loved Stephen. He looked stronger, richer, more prosperous than ever as he sat down, sympathetically, close to Stephen's chair. There he sat and talked, as it were, smoothing the sick man down. "We must have patience," he said soothingly. "After such an illness it will take so long to get up your strength. The sea-side would have been the best thing, but, unfortunately, it is a little late. I am so glad to hear your people are showing you how much they prize such a man as you among them; and I hope, with one thing and another—the pension, and so forth—you may be very comfortable. I would not venture to ask such a question, if it were not for Mr. Baldwin. He

takes so much interest in all your concerns."

"I am very glad you have spoken of it," said Haldane, "for I want to invest what little money I have in this bank I hear so much of—yours and Drummond's. I feel so much like a dying man—"

"No, no," said Mr. Burton, in a depreciating tone, "nothing half so bad. Providence, you may be sure, has something different in store for you. We must not think of that."

"At all events, I want to make the best of the money, for my mother and sister," said Stephen. And then he entered into business, telling them what he had, and how it was invested. His mind had been very full of this subject for some time past. The money was not much, but if he died, it would be all his mother and sister would have to depend upon, and the purse which his congregation had collected for him would increase his little, very little capital. Dr. Maurice had gone away, and the two women, though they heard everything, were withdrawn together into a corner. Mrs. Haldane had attempted several times to interrupt the conversation. "What do we care for money!" she had said, with tears in her eyes. "Let him alone, mother, it will make him happier," Miss Jane had said, in the voice that was so harsh with restrained emotion. And Stephen, with his two visitors beside him, and a flush upon his wan face, expounded all his affairs, and put his fortune into their hands. "Between you, you will keep my poor little nest-egg warm," he said, smiling upon them. His illness had refined his face, and gave him a certain pathetic dignity, and there was something that affected both in this appeal.

"I will sit on it myself sooner than let it cool," Drummond had said with a laugh, yet with the tears in his eyes, with an attempt to lighten the seriousness of the moment. "Dear old fellow, don't be afraid. Your sacred money will bring a blessing on the rest."

"That is all very pretty and poetical," said Mr. Burton, with a curious shade passing over his face; "but if Haldane has the slightest doubt on the subject, he should not make the venture. Of course, we are all prepared in the way of business to win or to lose. If we lose, we must bear it as well as we can. Of course, I think the investment as safe as the Bank of England—but at the same time, Drummond, it would be a very different thing to you or me from what it would be to him."

"Very different," said Drummond; but

the mere suggestion of loss had made him pale. "These are uncomfortable words," he went on with a momentary laugh. "For my part, I go in to win, without allowing the possibility of loss. Loss! Why I have been doing a great deal in ways less sure than Rivers's, and I have not lost a penny yet, thanks to you."

"I am not infallible," said Burton. "Of course, in everything there is a risk. I cannot make myself responsible. If Haldane has the least doubt or hesitation—"

"If I had, your caution would have reassured me," said the invalid. "People who feel their responsibility so much don't throw away their neighbour's money. It is all my mother has, and all I have. When you are tempted to speculate, think what a helpless set of people are involved—and no doubt there will be many more just as helpless. I think perhaps it would exercise a good influence on mercantile men," he added, with perhaps a reminiscence of his profession, "if they knew something personally of the people whose lives are, so to speak, in their hands."

"Haldane," said Mr. Burton hastily, "I don't think we ought to take your money. It is too great a risk. Trade has no heart and no bowels. We can't work in this way, you know, it would paralyse any man. Money is money, and has to be dealt with on business principles. God bless me! If I were to reflect about the people whose lives, &c.—I could never do anything! We can't afford to take anything but the market into account."

"I don't see that," said the painter, who knew as much about business as Mr. Burton's umbrella. "I agree with Haldane. We should be less ready to gamble and run foolish risks, if we remembered always what trusts we have in our hands: the honour of honest men, and the happiness of families—"

He was still a little pale, and spoke with a certain emotion, having suddenly realised, with a mixture of nervous boldness and terror, the other side of the question. Mr. Burton turned away with a shrug of his shoulders.

"It suits you two to talk sentiment instead of business," he said, "but that is not in my line. So long as my own credit is concerned, I find that a much greater stimulant than anybody else's. Self-interest is the root of everything—in business; and if you succeed for yourself, which of course is your first motive, you succeed for your neighbours as well. I don't take credit for any fine sentiments. That is my commercial creed. Num-

ber one includes all the other numbers, and the best a man can do for his friends is to take care of himself."

He got up with a slight show of impatience as he spoke. His face was overcast, and he had the half-contemptuous air which a practical man naturally assumes when he listens to anything high-flown. He, for his part, professed to be nothing but a man of business, and had confidence enough in his friends' knowledge of him to be able to express the most truculent sentiments. So, at least, Haldane thought, who smiled at this transparent cynicism. "I suppose, then, we are justified in thinking anything that is bad of you, and ought not to trust you with a penny?" he said.

"If you trust anything to me personally, of course I shall take care of it," answered the merchant. "But what we were talking of was Rivers's—business, not personal friendship. And business cannot afford such risks. You must examine into it, and judge of its claims for yourself. Come, let us dismiss the subject. I will tell Mr. Baldwin I found you looking a great deal better than I hoped."

"But I don't want to dismiss the subject," said Haldane. "I am satisfied. I am anxious——"

"Think it over once more, at least," said the other hastily; and he went away with but scant leave-taking. Mrs. Haldane, who was a wise woman, and, without knowing it, a physiognomist, shook her head.

"That man means what he says," she said with some emphasis. "He is telling you his real principles. If I were you, Stephen, I would take him at his word."

"My dear mother, he is one of the men who take pleasure in putting the worst face on human nature, and attributes everything to selfish motives," said the sick man. "I very seldom believe those who put such sentiments so boldly forth."

"But I do," said his mother, shaking her head with that obstinate conviction which takes up its position at once and defies all reason. Her son made no answer. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. The momentary excitement was over, the friends gone, and the new and terrible Life settled down upon him. He did not say a word to indicate what was passing through his mind, but he thought of the ship which drifted between the sea and the mariner, and the nightmare Life in death casting her dice with the less appalling skeleton. It was she who had won.

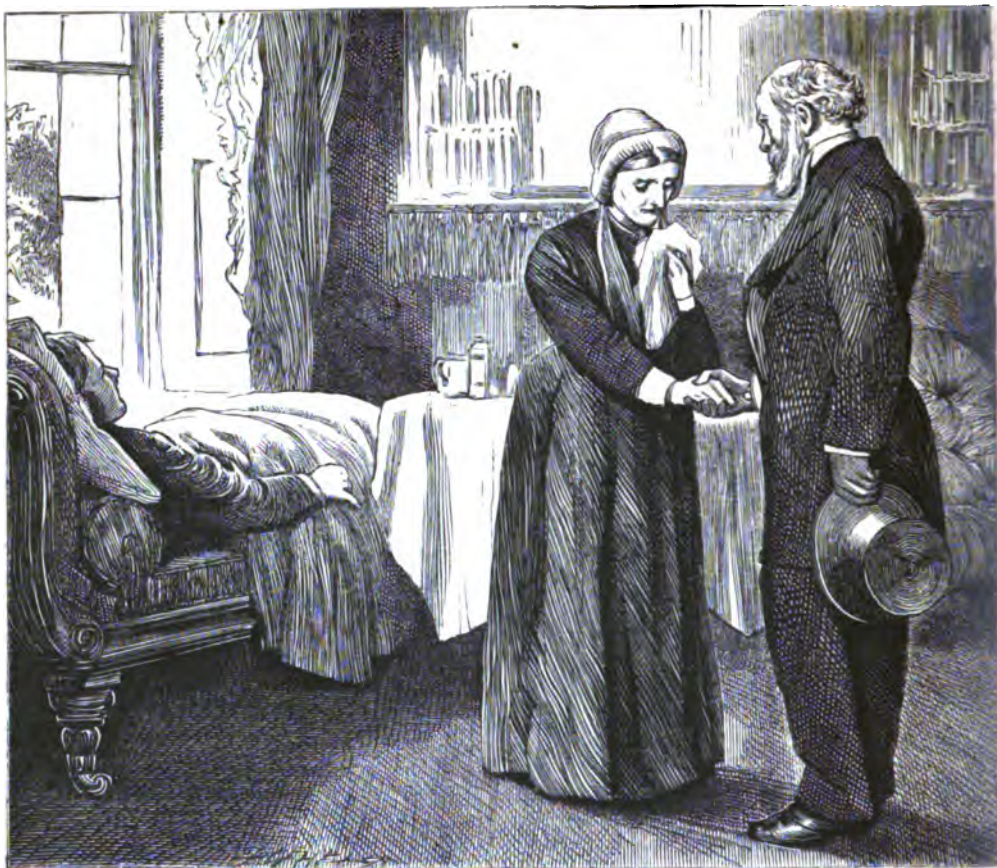
In the meantime the two directors of

Rivers's bank walked out together; one of them recovering all his self-confidence the moment he left the house, the other possessed by a certain tremulous excitement. The idea of risk was new to the painter. He felt a certain half-delightful, half-alarming agitation when he made his first ventures, but that had soon yielded to his absolute confidence in the man who now, with his own lips, had named the fatal word. Robert's imagination, the temperament of the artist, which is so often fantastically moved by trifles, while strong to resist the presence of fact and certainty, had sustained a shock. He did not say anything while they walked up the road under the faded autumnal leaves which kept dropping through the still air upon their heads. In this interval he had represented to himself all the solid guarantees, all the prestige, all the infallibility (for had it not attained that point?) of Rivers's. Sure as the Bank of England! Such were the words that rose continually to everybody's lips on hearing of it. Robert propped himself up as he went along with one support and another, till he felt ashamed that he could be capable of entertaining a shadow of doubt. But the impression made upon his nerves was not to be overcome by simple self-argument. Time was wanted to calm it down. He felt a certain thrill and jar communicated through all the lines of life. The sensation ran to his very finger-points, and gave a sharp electric shock about the roots of his hair. And it set his heart and his pulse beating, more likely organs to be affected. Loss! That was to say Helen and the child deprived of the surroundings that made their life so fair; driven back to the poor little lodgings, perhaps, in which their life began, or to something poorer still. Perhaps to want, perhaps to—— "What a fool I am!" he said to himself.

"Do you really object to Haldane as one of our shareholders?" he said, with a certain hesitation, at last.

"Object—the idiot!" said Mr. Burton.

"I beg your pardon, Drummond, I know he's a great friend of yours; but all that nonsense exasperates me. Why, God bless me, his body is sick, but his mind is as clear as yours or mine. Why can't he judge for himself? I am quite ready to give him, or you, or any one that interests me, the benefit of my experience; but to take you on my shoulders, Drummond, you know, would be simply absurd. I can't foresee what may happen. I am ready to run the risk myself. That's the best guarantee I can give, don't you think?"



but I won't run any sentimental risks. You may, if you like; they are out of my line."

"I don't know what you mean by sentimental risks."

"Oh, as for that, it is easy to explain. The man is very ill: he will never be of any use in life again, and loss would be destruction to him. Therefore I won't take the responsibility. Why, there may be a revolution in England next year, for anything I can tell. There may be an invasion. Our funds may be down to zero, and our business paralyzed. How can I tell? All these things are within the bounds of possibility, and if they happened, and we went to smash, as we should infallibly, what would Haldane do?"

"If there is nothing to alarm us closer at hand than a revolution or an invasion——" said Drummond with a smile.

"How can we tell? If I were asked to insure England, I should only do it on a very heavy premium, I can tell you. And look here, Drummond, take my advice: always let a man judge for himself, never take the re-

sponsibility. If you do, you'll be sorry after. I never knew a good man of business yet who went in, as I said, for sentimental risks."

"I fear I shall never be a good man of business," said the painter, with a certain sickness at his heart. "But tell me now, suppose you were guardian to orphans, what should you do with their money? I suppose that is what you would call a very sentimental risk."

"Not so bad as Haldane," said Burton. "They would be young and able to make their way if the worst came to the worst. If they were entirely in my own hands, I should invest the money as I thought best; but if there were other guardians or relations to make a fuss, I should put it in the Three per Cents."

"I really—don't—quite see what—difference that would make——" Robert commenced, but his companion stopped him almost roughly.

"The question won't bear discussing, Drummond. If I go in with you, will your

wife give me some lunch? I have lost my whole morning to please my father-in-law. Don't you bother yourself about Haldane. He is a clear-headed fellow, and perfectly able to judge for himself."

Then no more was said. If a passing cloud had come over the merchant, it fled at sight of the table spread for luncheon, and the sherry, upon which poor Robert (knowing almost as little about that as he did about business) prided himself vastly. Mr. Burton applauded the sherry. He was more conversational even than usual, and very anxious that Drummond should look at a country-house in his neighborhood. "If you can't afford it now, you very soon will," he said, and without referring to Rivers's, kept up such a continued strain of allusions to the good-fortune which was about to pour upon the house, that Robert's nerves were comforted, he could scarcely have told how. But he went and worked all the afternoon in

the studio when the city man went off to his business. He labored hard at Francesca, fixing his whole mind upon her, not even whistling in his profound preoccupation. He had been absent from the studio for some time, and the *feel* of the old beloved tools was delightful to him. But when the early twilight came and interrupted his work, he went out and took a long walk by himself, endeavoring to shake off the tremor which still lingered about him. It was in his veins and in his nerves, tingling all over him. He reasoned with himself, shook himself up roughly, took himself to task, but yet did not get over it. "Bah! it is simple sensation!" he said at last, and with a violent effort turned his thoughts in another direction. But the shock had left a tremor about him which was not quite dissipated for days after; for a man who is made of fanciful artist-stuff is not like a business man with nerves of steel.



PART III

CHAPTER VII



NOTHING happened, however, to justify Drummond's fears. The success of Rivers's in its new form was as great and as steady to all appearance as that of its ancient phase. People vied with each other in rushing into it, in crowding its coffers and its share lists.

Stephen Haldane, "left to himself," according to Mr. Burton's instructions, had long since deposited all he had in its hands; and almost all of Robert's professional friends who had any money to invest, invested it in the bank which had an R.A. upon the roll of directors. People came to him to ask his advice who in other times would have given him theirs freely, with no such respect for his judgment. But though this was the case, and though ignorant persons in society sometimes wondered how he could make the two occupations compatible, and carry on business and art together, yet the fact was that business and Robert had very little to do with each other. He went to the meetings of the directors now and then. He was blandly present sometimes at an auditing of accounts. He listened at times to the explanations given by Mr. Golden, the manager, and found them everything that was reasonable and wise. But beyond that he cannot be said to have taken much part in the management. For this mild part he was abundantly rewarded—so abundantly that he sometimes felt half ashamed, reflecting that the clerks in the offices actually contributed more to the success of the place than he did, though they did not profit half so much. He felt himself justified in taking a nice house in the country, though not at Dura, at the end of the first season, and he

gave his wife a pretty little carriage with two ponies on her birthday, in which she drove about with a pleasure perhaps more real than that which any other circumstance of their prosperity gave her. They did not leave their house in St. Mary's Road, for it was dear to them in many ways, and still satisfied all their wants; and Robert could not tolerate the idea of another painter using the studio he had built, or another woman enjoying the conservatory which had been made for Helen. "However rich we may grow—even if we should ever be able to afford that house in Park Lane—we must keep this," he said; "no profane foot must come in, no stranger intrude upon our household gods; and Norah must have it after us, the house she was born in." Thus they planned their gentle romance, though they had been a dozen years married and more, and bought the house they loved with their first disposable money. And Robert still loved his work and kept to it, though he did not need now to trouble about the exhibitions and push on his picture, working from the early morning down to twilight to get it ready. He got a little lazy about finished pictures, to tell the truth. Even Francesca, though he loved her, had been put aside on the spare easel, and never completed. "I will get up early and set to work in earnest to-morrow," he always said; but to-morrow generally found him like the day before, making a study of something—sketching in now one subject, now another—tormenting his wife with questions as to which was best. She had a good deal to put up with in this period; but she kept up under it and bore it all smilingly. And Robert, like so many more, made his sketches much better than his pictures, and put ideas upon his canvas which, if he could but have carried them out, might have been great.

Thus two years passed over the pair; and there were times when Helen thought, with a leap of her heart, that ease and leisure had done what care and toil could not do—had roused a spark of divine genius in her husband's breast. Now and then he drew something that went right to her heart, and it was she who had always been his harshest critic. When she said to him one day suddenly, without purpose or meaning, "I like that, Robert," he turned round upon her all flushed and glowing, more radiant than when he was made an R.A. It was not that he

had supreme confidence in her knowledge of art, but that her backing of him, the support which he had longed for all these years, was more than the highest applause, and invigorated his very soul. But he was so pleased to have pleased her, that he set up his sketch upon a bigger canvas, and worked at it and improved it till he had improved the soul out of it, and Helen applauded no more. He was much mortified and disappointed at this failure; but then in his humility he said to himself, "What does it matter now? I am an R.A., which is the best I could be in my profession, so far as the world is concerned, and we have something else to stand upon besides the pictures." Thus he consoled himself, and so did she.

And, in the meantime, Norah kept growing, and became a more distinct feature in the household. She was a feature more than an agent still; though she was nearly twelve not much was heard of her except the scales, which she still rattled over dutifully every morning, and the snatches of songs she would sing in the lightness of her heart as she went or came. On most ordinary occasions she simply composed such a foreground to the family picture as Maurice had seen that October night. She sat on a stool or on the floor somewhere, with a book clasped in her arms, reading; in summer she and her book together crouched themselves against the window in the room, getting the last gleam of daylight, and in winter she read by the firelight, which crimsoned her all over with a ruddy glow, and scorched her cheeks. Perhaps it was because she was kept conscientiously at work all day that Norah thus devoured all the books she could lay hands on in the evenings. She sat in her corner and read, and heard what was going on all the same, and took no notice. She read everything, from Grimm's Tales and the Arabian Nights to Shakspeare, and from Shakspeare to Tennyson, with an indiscriminating all-devouring appetite; and as she sat in a dream, lost in one volume after another, the current of life flowed past, and she was aware of it, and heard a hundred things she was unconscious of hearing, yet remembered years after. She heard discussions between her father and mother which she was supposed to pay no attention to. And she did not pay any attention to them: but only innocently—an unconscious eavesdropper—heard everything, and received it into her mind. This was the child's position in the house; she was the centre of the picture—everything somehow

bore a reference to her; she alone was silent in the midst. The other two—who loved her, talked of her, planned for her, contrived that everything that was pretty and pleasant and sweet should surround her waking and sleeping—had yet no immediate need of Norah. They were each other's companions, and she was the third—the one left out. But she was too young to feel any jealousy, or to struggle for a place between them. She had her natural place, always in the foreground, a silent creature, unconsciously observing, laying up provision for her life.

"Are you not afraid to talk of everything before your daughter?" Mr. Golden said one day when she had left the room. "You know the old proverb, 'Little pitchers have long ears.'"

"Afraid of—Norah?" said Robert. The idea was so extraordinary that he laughed first, though the moment after he felt disposed to be angry. "My child understands what honour is, though she is so young," he said with paternal pride, and then laughed, and added, "That is highflown of course, but you don't understand her, Golden; how should you? She is a thousand times too deeply occupied to care for what we are saying. Pardon me, but the suggestion, to one who knows her, is so very absurd."

"Ah, you never know where simplicity ends and sense begins," said the bank manager. He had become a frequent guest at St. Mary's Road. He was a man of Mr. Burton's type, but younger, slightly bald, perfectly brushed, clean, and perfumed, and decorous. He was a little too heavy for the rôle of a young man in society: and yet he danced and flirted with the best when an opportunity offered. He never spoke of the City when he could help it: but he spoke a great deal about Lady So-and-so's party, and the fine people he knew. It was difficult to make out how he knew them; but yet he visited, or professed to visit at a great many of what are called "good houses." As manager of the bank he had every man's good opinion—he was at once so enterprising and so prudent, with the most wonderful head for business. There was no one like him for interpreting the "movements" on the Stock Exchange, or the fluctuations of the Funds. He explained business matters so lucidly that even Drummond understood them, or at least thought he did. But there were a good many people who did not like Mr. Golden. Helen for one had a natural antipathy to the man. She allowed that she had no reason for it; that he was very civil, sometimes amusing, and

had never done anything she could find fault with. But she disliked him all the same. Norah was more decided in her sentiments, and had a clearer foundation for them. He had insisted on disturbing her from her book one afternoon to shake hands with her; on another he had offered to kiss her, as a child, and she nearly twelve! "But then you are so little of your age, Miss Norah. I daresay the gentleman took you for nine," said her maid—an explanation which did not render Norah more favourably inclined towards the manager. And now he was trying to libel her, to traduce her to her father! Even Robert himself was moved by this enormity; it shook his opinion of his counsellor. "That is all he knows," Drummond said to himself; and he resumed his conversation more distinctly than ever when Norah came back.

In the meantime the Haldanes had thriven too, in their way. Stephen was as helpless, as far from any hope of moving as ever; but he was well off, which alleviates much suffering. The walls of his room were hung with Drummond's sketches, half a dozen of them, among which were two pictures of Norah. He lived in an arm-chair elaborately fitted with every possible contrivance, with a reading-desk attached to its arm, and a table close by, which could be raised to any height: and his helpless limbs were covered with a silken quilt of Mrs. Haldane's own working. There he passed the day and night without change: but thanks to Miss Jane and her mother, no strange eye had looked upon the helpless man's humiliation; they moved him from his chair to his bed, and did everything for him. The bed was closed up by day, so that no stranger might suspect its existence; and the room was kept airy and bright by the same unwearied watchers. Here he lived, making no complaint. Whatever his feelings might be, whatever the répinings in his mind, he said nothing of them to mortal ear. A shade of weariness the more upon his face, a deeper line than usual between his eyes, were the only tokens that now and then the deep waters overflowed his soul. And as for the mother and sister, who were his slaves and attendants, they had forgotten that there was anything unusual in his condition—they had become accustomed to it. It seemed to them in some sort the course of nature. And God knows whether unconsciously a feeling that it was "for the best" might not sometimes steal into their minds. He was theirs for ever; no one could step in between them, or draw his heart from their

love. Had it been suggested to Miss Jane that such a sentiment was possible, she would have rejected it with horror; and yet in the depths of her heart it was there, out of her own sight.

And he had an occupation in his seclusion which was a blessing to him. He had become the editor of a little magazine, which belonged to his "denomination" before he fell ill, and he had been allowed to retain the post. This was the refuge of his mind in his trouble. Poor Stephen, he pleased himself with the idea of still influencing somebody, of preserving his intercourse with the outer world. It had been a very homely little publication when it came into his hands—a record of what the "denomination" was doing; the new chapels it was building; the prayer-meetings gathered here and there, which might grow into congregations; and the tea-parties, which furnished at once intellectual and social enjoyment for the people. But Stephen had changed that; he had put his mind into it, and worked it into a sort of literary organ. There were reviews in it, and essays, and a great deal of discussion of the questions of the day. These were approached from the standing ground of the denomination, it is true, but the discussions were often far from being denominational. Up to this time, however, the community gave no signs of disapproval. Mr. Baldwin favoured the magazine, and the writer of it was still popular, and not yet forgotten. They gave him some fifty pounds a year for this hard though blessed work which kept his mind alive; and his late congregation gave him fifty pounds; and the money in Rivers's bank had last quarter paid ten per cent. of profit. He was well off, he was indeed rich for his wants, though he was not rolling in wealth like Drummond. Money makes no man happy, but how much good it does! Nothing could make this poor man happy, rooted thus in his immovable calm; but his ten per cent. kept him in comfort, it gave him worship in the eyes of his people, who were not fond of poverty; it procured to him his only consolation. He had no need to be indebted to any one; he could even help the poor people of his former flock, and feel himself independent. He could buy books, and give such quiet comforts and pleasures as they could enjoy to the women who were so good to him. All these were great alleviations of the sick man's lot. But for Rivers's how different would his position have been! He would have been subject to the constant inspection of deacons and brethren; he would have been interfered with in respect to

his magazine. All the comfort and freedom which remained to him were the result of the little more which made him independent and put him above criticism. What a poor thing money is, which cannot buy either health or happiness! and yet what a great thing! only the poor know how great.

This time of prosperity had lasted for two years, when Mr. Burton withdrew from the direction of the bank. He had enlarged his business greatly in another way, and had no longer time to bestow upon this; and, indeed, he had professed all along his desire to be free. This had been the object of the old company in taking in "new blood," and now the new company was able to proceed alone upon their triumphant way.

"It is your turn to get into harness, Drummond," he said, with a glance in which there was some contempt. Robert did not see the scorn, but he laughed with perhaps a little gentle confidence in his own power to be of use if he should choose to exert himself.

"I must put myself into training first," he said.

"Golden will do that for you. Golden is the best coach for business I have ever come across," said Mr. Burton. "He will put you up to everything, good and bad—the dodges as well as the legitimate line. Golden is not a common man of business—he is a great artist in trade."

There was a certain elation in his air and words. Was he glad to have shaken off the bonds of Rivers's, though they were golden bonds? This was the question which Helen asked herself with a little surprise. The two men were dining at St. Mary's Road on the night after Burton's withdrawal, and she was still at table, though they had begun to talk of business. As usual, she who took no part was the one most instructed by the conversation. But she was bewildered, not instructed, by this. She could not make out what it meant. She knew by the best of all proofs that the bank was profitable and flourishing. Why, then, did her cousin show such high spirits? What was his elation about? Long after she remembered that she had noted this, and then was able to divine the mystery. But now it only surprised her vaguely, like a foreign phrase in the midst of the language she knew.

"The dodges are amusing," said Mr. Golden. "The legitimate drama is more dignified and imposing, but I rather think there is more fun in the work when you are living on the very edge of ruin. The hair-

breadth escapes one has—the sense that it is one's own cleverness that carries one through—the delight of escaping from the destruction that seemed down upon you! There is nothing like that," he said with a laugh, "in the steady platitudes of ordinary trade."

And Mr. Burton laughed too, and a glance passed between them, such as might have passed between two old soldiers who had gone many a campaign together. There was a twinkle in their eyes, and the "Do you remember?" seemed to be on their very lips. But then they stopped short, and went no further. Helen, still vaguely surprised, had to get up and go away to the drawing-room; and what more experiences these two might exchange, or whether her husband would be any the wiser for them, she was no longer able to see. Norah waited her in the other room. She had just come to the end of a book, and, putting it down with a sigh, came and sat by her mother's side. They were alike in general features and complexion, though not in the character of their faces. Norah's hair was brighter, and her expression less stately and graceful than Helen's—she had not so much *distinction*, but she had more life. Such a woman as her mother she was never likely to be, but her attractions would be great in her own way.

"How nice your velvet gown is, mamma!" said Norah, who was given to long monologues when she spoke at all. "I like to put my cheek upon it. When I am grown up, I will always wear black velvet in winter, and white muslin in summer. They are the nicest of all. I do not think that you are too old for white. I like you in white, with red ribbons. When I am a little bigger I should like to dress the same as you, as if we were two sisters. Mayn't we? Everybody says you look so young. But, mamma, ain't you glad to get away from those men, and come in here to me?"

"You vain child!" said Helen. "I can see you whenever I like, so it is no novelty to me; while papa's friends—"

"Do you think they are papa's friends? I suppose there are no villains nowadays, like what there are in books?" said Norah. "The world is rather different from books somehow. There you can always see how everything happens; and there is always somebody clever enough to find out the villains. Villains themselves are not very clever, they always let themselves be found out."

"But, my dear, we are not talking of villains," said Helen.

"No, mamma, only of that Mr. Golden.

I hate him! If you and I were awfully clever, and could see into him what he means——"

"You silly little girl! You have read too many novels," said Helen. "In the world people are often selfish, and think of their own advantage first; but they don't try to ruin others out of pure malice, as they do in stories. Even Norah Drummond sometimes thinks of herself first. I don't know if she is aware of it, but still it happens; and though it is not always a sin to do that, still it is the way that most sins come about."

This purely maternal and moral turn of the conversation did not amuse Norah. She put her arm round her mother's waist, and laid her cheek against the warm velvet of Helen's gown.

"Mamma, it is not fair to preach when no one is expecting it," she said in an injured tone; "and just when I have you all to myself! I don't often have you to myself. Papa thinks you belong to him most. Often and often I want to come and talk, but papa is so greedy; you ought to think you belong to me too."

"But, my darling, you have always a book," said Helen, not insensible to the sweet flattery.

"When I can't have you, what else am I to do?" said crafty Norah; and when the gentlemen came into the drawing-room, the two were still sitting together, talking of a hundred things. Mr. Golden came up, and tried very hard to be admitted into the conversation, but Norah walked away altogether, and went into her favourite corner, and Mrs. Drummond did not encourage his talk. She looked at him with a certain flutter of excited curiosity, wondering if there was anything under that smooth exterior which was dangerous and meant harm; and smiled at herself and said, no, no; enemies and villains exist only in books. The worst of this man would be that he would pursue his own ends, let them suffer who might; and his own ends could not harm Drummond—or so at least Helen thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was in the summer of the third year of his bank directorship that Robert made his first personal entry into business. The occasion of it was this. One of his early friends who had been at school with him, and with whom he had kept up a private and often interrupted intercourse, came to him one morning with an anxious face. He was in business himself, with a little office in one of the dreary lanes in the City, a single clerk,

and very limited occupation. He had married young, and had a large family; and Drummond was already aware, that while the lines had fallen to himself in pleasant places, poor Markham's lot had been hard and full of thorns. He was now at the very crisis of his troubles. He gave a glance round the painter's handsome studio when he entered, at the pictures on the walls and the costly things about, and the air of evident luxury that pervaded everything, and sighed. His own surroundings were poor and scant enough. And yet he could and did remember that Drummond had started in life a poorer man, with less hopeful prospects than himself. Such a contrast is not lively or inspiring, and it requires a generous mind to take it kindly, and refrain from a passing grudge at the old companion who has done so much better for himself. Poor Markham had come with a petition, on which, he said, all his future life depended. He had made a speculation which would pay him largely could he only hold out for three months; but without help from his friends this was impossible. It was a large sum that he wanted—more than any private friend would be likely to give him—something between two and three thousand pounds. The welfare of his family, his very existence in a business point of view, and the hopes of his children depended on his ability to tide those three months over. For old friendship's sake, for all the associations of their youth, would Drummond help him? Robert listened with his kindly heart full of sympathy. Long before the story was done, he began to calculate what he had at his disposal, how much he could give; but the sum startled him. He could not produce at a moment's notice a sum of nearly three thousand pounds. With a troubled heart he shook his head and said it was impossible—he had not so much money at his disposal—he could not do it. Then Markham eagerly explained. It was not from his friend's own purse that he had hoped for it; but the bank! On Drummond's introduction, the bank would do it. Rivers's could save him. No such request had ever been made to Robert before. Very few of his friends were business men. Their needs were private needs, and not the spasmodic wants of trade. There were people who had borrowed from himself personally, and some who had been helped by him in other ways; but this was the first appeal made to his influence in the bank. He was startled by it in his innocence of business ways. It seemed to him as if it was like

asking a private favour, turning over his own petitioner to a third person. "He is my friend, give him three thousand pounds." It seemed to him the strangest way of being serviceable to his neighbour. But poor Markham had all the eloquence of a partially ruined man. He made it clear to Robert, not only that such things were, but that they happened continually, and were in the most ordinary course of nature. The end was that they went out together, and had an interview with Mr. Golden at the bank. And then Robert found that his acquaintance had not exaggerated, that the matter was even easier than he had represented it, and that there would not be the slightest difficulty in "accommodating" the man who was Mr. Drummond's friend. Markham and he parted at the door of the bank, the one with tears of gratitude in his eyes, blessing God and Robert for saving him, and the other with a bewildered sense of power which he had not realised. He had not known before how much he could do, nor what privileges his directorship put in his hands, and he was confused by the discovery. It bewildered him, as a man might be bewildered to know that he could bestow fertility or barrenness on his fields by a glance—how strange the power was, how sweet in this instance, how—dangerous. Yes, that was the word. He felt afraid of himself as he went home. If such complaints came to him often, it would be so difficult to resist them; and then a kind of horrible dread came over his mind. Would the money ever be paid back that he had got so easily? The thought made his hand shake when he went back to the peaceable work, at which no such bewildering risks were run.

When the three months were over, Markham's money was not paid; on the contrary, he had fled to Australia, he and all his children, leaving nothing but some wretched old furniture behind him. Poor Drummond was nearly beside himself. He rushed to the bank when he heard the news, and protested that the loss must be his. It was his fault, and of course he must repay it. Mr. Golden smiled at him with a genuine admiration of his simplicity. He told him in a fatherly way of a speculation which had been very successful which had cleared nearly the same sum of money. "Putting the one to the other, we are none the worse," he said, "every commercial concern must make some bad debts."

Drummond went away with more bewilderment still, with many new thoughts

buzzing in his head, thoughts which troubled the composure of his life. He himself being but an artist, and not a merchant, was afraid of money. He touched it warily, trafficked in it with a certain awe. He knew how much labour it required to earn it, and how hard it was to be without it. He could not understand the levity with which Burton and Golden treated that potent thing. To them it was like common merchandise, sugar or salt. A heap of it, as much as would make a poor man's fortune, melted away in a moment, and the bland manager thought nothing of it—it was a bad debt. All this was so strange to him, that he did not know what to make of it. He himself was guilty, he felt, of having thrown away so much which belonged to other people. And every other director on the board had the same power which he had with a painful pleasure discovered himself to have. And they knew better about it than he did; and what check could there be upon them? If every other man among them had been art and part in losing three thousand pounds, what could Robert say? It would not be for him to throw the first stone. He felt like Christian in the story, when, upon the calm hillside, he suddenly saw a door through which there was, open and visible, the mouth of hell. It occurred to Robert to go down to the next meeting of directors, to tell them his own story, and beg that the money lost through his means should be subtracted from his private share of the capital, and to beg all of them to do likewise. He quite made up his mind to this in the first tumult of his thoughts. But before the time for that meeting came, a sense of painful ridicule, that bugbear of the Englishman, had daunted him. They would call him a fool, they would think he was "canting," or taking an opportunity to display his own disinterestedness. And accordingly he accepted the misfortune, and was content to permit it to be called a bad debt. But the enlightenment which it threw on the business altogether gave Robert a shock which he did not easily recover. It seemed to show him a possible chasm opening at his very feet, and not at his only, but at the feet of all the ignorant simple people, the poor painters, the poor women, the sick men like Haldane, who had placed their little seed-corn of money in Rivers's bank.

These thoughts were hot in his heart at the time of this misadventure with Markham; and then there came a lull, and he partially forgot them. When no harm is visible, when the tranquil ordinary course of affairs seems to

close over a wrong or a blunder, it is so difficult to imagine that everything will not go well. He said as little as possible to Helen on the subject, and she did not take fright fortunately, having many things to occupy her nowadays. There was her own enlarged and fuller household, the duties of society, her charities; for she was very good to the poor people near Southlees, their house in the country, and kept watch over them even from St. Mary's Road. And she had now many friends who came and occupied her time, and carried her off from her husband; so that he had not that resource of talking about it which so often lightens our anxiety, and so often deepens it. In this instance, perhaps it was as well that he could not awaken her fears to increase and stimulate his own.

And thus everything fell into its usual quietness. Life was so pleasant for them. They had so much real happiness to cushion the angles of the world, and make them believe that all would always be well. Those who have been experienced in pain are apt to tremble and doubt the continuance of happiness when they attain it; but to those who have had no real sorrows it seems eternal. Why should it ever come to an end? This the Drummonds felt with an instinctive confidence. It was easier to believe in any miracle of good than in the least prognostic of evil. The sun was shining upon them; summer was sweet and winter pleasant. They had love, they had ease, they had wealth, as much as they desired, and they believed in it. The passing cloud rolled away from Robert's mind. He reflected that if there was danger there, there was danger in everything; every day, he said to himself, every man may be in some deadly peril without knowing it. We pass beneath the arch that falls next moment; we touch against some one's shoulder unaware whose touch of infection might be death; we walk over the mined earth, and breathe air which might breed a pestilence, and yet nothing happens to us. Human nature is against everything violent. Somehow she holds a balance, which no one breaks down, though it is possible to be broken down at any moment. The directors might ruin the bank in a week, but they would not, any more than the elements, which are ever ready for mischief, would clash together and produce an earthquake. Such things might be: but never—or so seldom as to be next to never—are.

In the early autumn of that year, however, another shock came upon the ignorant painter. His wife and Norah were at Southlees, where

he himself had been. Business had brought him up against his will, business of the gentler kind, concerning art and the Academy, not the bank. He was alone at St. Mary's Road, chafing a little over his solitude, and longing for home and the pleasant fields. London, the London he knew and cared for, had gone out of town. August was blazing upon the parks and streets; the grass was the colour of mud, and the trees like untanned leather. The great people were all away in their great houses, and among his own profession those who could afford it had started for Switzerland or some other holiday region, and those who could not had gone for their annual whiff of sea-air. Robert was seated by himself at breakfast, mournfully considering how another day had to be got over, before he could go home, when a hansom dashed up to the door, and Mr. Golden, bland and clean as ever, but yet with a certain agitation in his face, came in. He explained eagerly that he had come to Drummond only because the other directors were out of town. "The fact is," he said, "I want you to come with me, not to give you much trouble or detain you long, but to stand by me, if you will, in a crisis. We have had some losses. Those people in Calcutta who chose to stop payment, like fools, and the Sullivans' house at Liverpool.—It is only temporary.—But the Bank of England has made itself disagreeable about an advance, and I want you to come with me and see the governor."

"An advance! Is Rivers's in difficulties; is there anything wrong? You take away my breath."

"There is no occasion for taking away your breath," said Mr. Golden; "it is only for the moment. But it is an awkward time of the year, for everybody is out of town. I should not have troubled you, knowing you were not a business man, but of course the presence of a director gives authority. Don't be alarmed, I beg. I will tell you all about it as we drive along."

But what Mr. Golden told was very inarticulate to Robert, what with the wild confusion produced in his own mind, and the noise and dust of the sultry streets. It was the most temporary difficulty; it was not worth speaking of; it was a simple misunderstanding on the part of the authorities of the Bank of England. "Why, we are worth twenty times the money, and everybody knows it," said Mr. Golden. His words, instead of making Robert confident, made him sick. His sins in that matter of Markham

came darkly before him; and, worse even than that, the manager's words recalled Markham's to him. In his case, too, it was to have been merely a temporary difficulty. Drummond's imaginative mind rushed at once to the final catastrophe. He saw ruin staring him in the face—and not only him.

The interview with the authorities of the Bank of England did not make things much clearer to the amateur. They talked of previous advances; of their regret that the sacred name of "Rivers's" should be falling into mist and darkness; of their desire to have better securities, and a guarantee which would be more satisfactory: to all of which Robert listened with consternation in his soul. But at last the object was attained. Mr. Golden wiped the moisture from his forehead as they left the place. "That has been a tough battle," he said, "but, thank heaven! it is done, and we are tided over. I knew they would not be such fools as to refuse."

"But, good God!" said Robert, "what have you been doing? What is the meaning of it? Why do you require to go hat in hand to any governor? Is Rivers's losing its position? What has happened? Why don't you call the shareholders together and tell them if anything is wrong?"

"My dear Mr. Drummond," said Mr. Golden. He could scarcely do more than smile and say the words.

"Don't smile at me," said Drummond in the ardour of his heart. "Do you consider that you have the very lives of hundreds of people in your hands? Call them together, and let them know what remains, for God's sake! I will make good what was lost through me."

"You are mad," said Golden, when he saw that his gentle sneer had failed; "such a step would be ruin. Call together the shareholders! Why, the shareholders—Mr. Drummond, for heaven's sake, let people manage it who know what they are about."

"For heaven's sake! for hell's sake, you mean," said Robert in his despair. And the words reverberated in his ears, rang out of all the echoes, sounded through the very streets, "It would be ruin!" Ruin! that was the word. It deafened him, muttering and ringing in his ears.

And yet even after this outburst he was calmed down. Mr. Golden explained it to him. It was business; it was the common course of affairs, and only his own entire inexperience made it so terrible to him: To the others it was not in the least terrible, and yet he had no right to conclude that his col-

leagues were indifferent either to their own danger, or to the danger of the shareholders of whom he thought so much. "The shareholders of course know the risks of business as well as we do," Mr. Golden said. "We must act for the best, both for them and for ourselves." And the painter was silenced if not convinced. This was in the autumn, and during the entire winter which followed the bank went on like a ship in a troubled sea. After a while such a crisis as the one which had so infinitely alarmed him became the commonest of incidents even to Drummond. Now that his eyes had been once enlightened, it was vain to attempt any further concealment. One desperate struggle he did indeed make, when in the very midst of all this anxiety a larger dividend than usual was declared. The innocent man fought wildly against this practical lie, but his resistance was treated as utter folly by the business board, who were, as they said, "fighting the ship." "Do you want to create a panic and a run upon us?" they asked him. He had to be silent, overpowered by the judgment of men who knew better than himself. And then something of the excitement involved in that process of "fighting the ship" stole into his veins. Somehow by degrees, nobody had been quite aware how, the old partners of Rivers's had gone out of the concern. It was true there had been but three or four to start with; now there was but one left—Lord Rivers, the head of the house, who never took any share in the business, and was as ignorant as the smallest shareholder. The new directors, the fighting directors, were men of a very different class. As the winter went on the ship laboured more and more. Sometimes it seemed to go down altogether, and then rose again with a buoyancy which almost seemed to justify hope. "*Tout peut se rétablir*," they said to each other. "After all we shall tide it over." And even Robert began to feel that thrill of delight and relief when a danger was "tided over," that admiration, not of his own cleverness, but of the cleverness of others, which Golden had once described. Golden came out now in his true colours; his resources were infinite, his pluck extraordinary. But he enjoyed the struggle in the midst of his excitement and exertion, and Drummond did not enjoy it, which made an immense difference between them.

Things became worse and worse as spring came on. By that time, so far as Drummond was concerned, all hope was over. He felt himself sucked into the terrible whirlpool whence nothing but destruction could

come. With a heart unmanned by anxiety, and a hand shaking with suppressed excitement, how could he go into his peaceable studio and work at that calmest work, of art? That phase of his existence seemed to have been over for years. When he went into the room he loved it looked to him like some place he had known in his youth—it was fifty years off or more, though the colour was scarcely dry on the picture which stood idly on the easel. When he was called to Academy meetings, to consultations over an

old master, or a new rule, a kind of dull amazement filled his soul. Did people still care for such things—was it still possible that beauty and pleasantness remained in life? There were people in these days who felt even that the painter had fallen into bad ways. They saw his eyes bloodshot and his hand trembling. He was never seen with his wife now when she drove her ponies through the park—even in society Helen went sometimes out alone. And they had been so united, so happy a pair. "Drummond



See page 42.

will have nothing ready in April," the painters said to each other—"even his diploma picture has never been finished—prosperity has not agreed with *him*." When he was visible at all, his vacant air, his tremulous look, the deep lines under his eyes, frightened all his friends. Dr. Maurice had spoken to him very seriously, begging that he would be candid and tell his ailments. "You cannot go on like this," he said. "You are killing yourself, Drummond." "How much can a man go through without being killed, I wonder?" poor Robert asked, with an unsteady smile, and even his friend stopped short in

dismay and perplexity. Was it dissipation? Was it some concealed misery? Could his wife have anything to do with it? These suggestions flitted vaguely through the doctor's mind without bringing any certainty, with them. Once he seemed to be getting a clue to the mystery, when Robert rushed in upon him one day, and with a show of levity suggested that Haldane's money should be taken out of the bank. "I know a better investment, and he should have the very best that is going," said Drummond. Dr. Maurice was somewhat startled, for he had money in Rivers's too.

"Where is there a better investment?" he asked.

"In the Three per Cents.," said Robert, with a hoarse laugh.

Was he mad? Was he—drunk? The doctor took a day to consider it, to think whether there could be anything in it. But he looked at the dividend papers, showing that Rivers's that year had paid ten per cent. And he called upon Dr. Bradcliffe, and asked him to go with him privately, *accidentally*, one of these days, to see a friend whose brain was going, he feared. The two physicians shook their heads, and said to each other mournfully how common that was becoming. But Fate moved faster than Dr. Maurice, and the accidental call was never made.

CHAPTER IX.

THE life which Helen Drummond lived during this winter would be very hard to describe. Something wrong had happened, she saw, on that rapid visit to town which Robert had made on Academical business in October, leaving her at Southlees. No anxiety about business matters connected with the bank had ever been suggested to her mind. She had long ago accepted, as a matter of course, the fact that wealth was to come from that source, with an ease and regularity very different from the toilsome and slow bread-winning which was done by means of art. She was not surprised by it as Robert was; and enough of the *bourgeois* breeding was left in her to make her pleased that her husband should see the difference between the possibilities of his profession and of the commerce which she had been wont to hear lauded in her youth. She was almost proud that Trade had done so much for him. Trade came from her side, it was she who had the hereditary connection with it; and the innate idealism of her mind was able to cling to the old-fashioned fanciful conception of beneficent commerce, such as we have all heard of in our educational days. But her pride was not sensitive on this point. What really touched her was the praise or the blame which fell upon him as a painter, and the dread that instantly sprang into her mind was that he had met with something painful to him in this respect—that his opinion had not been received as of weight in the deliberations of the Academy, or his works been spoken off with less respect than they ought to have secured. This was the foolish fancy that took hold of her mind. She questioned him about the Academy meeting till poor Robert—his thoughts occu-

pied about things so very different—grew sick of the subject. Yet he was almost glad of some subject on which to vent a little of his excitement. Yes, they were a set of old fogies, he said, with audacious freedom. They pattered about things they did not understand. They puzzled and hesitated over that Rembrandt, which any one with half an eye could see had been worked at by some inferior hand. They threw cold water upon that loveliest Francia which nobody could see without recognising. They did what they ought not to do, and neglected what was their duty. "We all do that every day of our lives," said Helen; "but what was there that specially vexed you, Robert?" "Nothing," he said, looking up at her with eyes full of astonishment; but there was more than astonishment in them. There was pain, dread, anxiety—a wistful, restless look of suffering. He will not tell me: he will keep it to himself and suffer by himself, not to vex me, Helen said in her own thoughts. And though the autumn was lovely, Robert could not be happy at Southlees that year. He had been very happy the two previous summers. The house was situated on the Thames beyond Teddington. It was rustic and old, with various additions built to it; a red-brick house, grown over with all manner of lichens, irregular in form and harmonious with its position, a house which had grown—which had not been artificially made. The family had lived on the lawn, or on the river in those halcyon days that were past. There was a fringe of trees at every side except that, shutting in the painter's retirement; but on the river side nothing but a few bright flower-beds, and the green velvet lawn, sloping towards the softly flowing water. One long-leaved willow drooped over the stone steps at which the boat was lying. It was a place where a pair of lovers might have spent their honeymoon, or where the weary and sick might have come to get healing. It was not out of character either with the joy or the grief. Nature was so sweet, so silent, so meditative and calm. The river ran softly, brooding over its own low liquid gurgle. The stately swans sailed up and down. The little fishes darted about in the clear water, and myriads of flying atoms, nameless insect existences, fluttered above. Boating parties going down the stream would pause, with a sigh of gentle envy, to look at the group upon the lawn; the table with books and work on it, with sometimes a small easel beside it or big drawing pad supported on a

stand; a low chair with Helen's red shawl thrown over it, and Norah, with her red ribbons, nestled on the sunny turf. They sat there, and worked, and talked, or were silent, with an expansion of their hearts towards everything that breathed and moved; or they spent long days on the river, catching the morning lights upon those nooks which are only known to dwellers on the stream; or pursuing waterlilies through all the golden afternoon in the backwaters which these retired flowers love. The river was their life; and carried them along, day after day. Such a scene could not but be sweet to every lover of nature; but it is doubly sweet when the dumb poetic imagination has by its side that eye of art which sees everything. The painter is a better companion even than the poet—just as seeing is better than saying that you see. Robert was not a genius in art; but he had the artist's animated, all-perceiving eye. Nothing escaped him—he saw a hundred beautiful things which would have been inperceptible to ordinary men—a dew-drop on a blade of grass at his feet charmed him as much as a rainbow—his "Look, Helen!" was more than volumes of descriptive poetry. They were out and about at all times "watching the lights," as he said in his pleasant professional jargon; in the early mornings, when all was silvery softness and clearness, and the birds were trying over their choicest trills before men woke to hear; in the evening when twilight came gently on, insinuating her filmy impenetrable veil between them and the sunset; and even at full noon, when day is languid at the height of perfection, knowing that perfectness is brother to decadence. The painter and his wife lived in the middle of all these changes, and took them in, every one to the firmament in their hearts.

Why do we stop in this record of trouble to babble about sunset skies and running waters? Is it not natural? The "sound as of a hidden brook, in the leafy month of June" comes in, by right, among all weird mysterious harmonies of every tragical lute. "The oaten pipe and pastoral reed" have their share even in the hurly-burly of cities and noisy discord of modern existence. Robert Drummond had his good things as well as his evil things. For these two summers never man had been more happy—and it is but few who can say as much. His wife was happy with him, her old ghosts exorcised, and a new light suffusing her life. It seemed a new life altogether, a life without discontents, full of happiness, and tranquillity, and hope.

But this autumn Robert was not happy at Southlees. He could not stay there peaceably as he had done before. He had to go to town "on business," he said, sometimes twice a week. He took no pleasure in his old delights. Though he could not help seeing still, his "Look, Helen!" was no longer said in a tone of enthusiasm; and when he had uttered the familiar exclamation he would turn away and sigh. Sometimes she found him with his face hidden in his hands, and pressed against the warm greensward. It was as if he were knocking for admission at the gates of the grave, Helen thought, in that fancifulness which comes of fear as much as of hope. When she questioned him he would deny everything and work with pretended gaiety. Every time he went to town it seemed to her that five years additional of line and cloud had been added to the lines on his forehead. His hair began to get grey; perhaps that was no wonder, for he was forty, a pilgrim already in the sober paths of middle age; but Helen was nearly ten years younger, and this sign of advancing years seemed unnatural to her. Besides, he was a young man in his heart, a man who would be always young; yet he was growing old before his time. But notwithstanding his want of enjoyment in it he was reluctant that his wife should leave Southlees sooner than usual. He would go into town himself, he declared. He would do well enough—what did it matter for a few weeks? "For the sake of business it is better that I should go—but the winter is long enough if you come in the end of the month. No, Helen, take the good of it as long as you can—this year."

"What good shall I get of it alone, and how can I let you live for weeks by yourself?" said Helen. "You may think it is fine to be independent; but you could not get on without Norah and me."

"No," he said, with a shudder. "God knows life would be a poor thing without Norah and you; but when it is a question of three weeks—I'll go and see my friends; I'll live a jovial bachelor life—"

"Did you see the Haldanes," she asked, "when you were in town last?"

It was the most innocent unmeaning question; but it made him grow pale to the very lips. Did he tremble? Helen was so startled that she did not even realise how it was he looked.

"How cold the wind blows," he said, with a shiver. "I must have caught cold, I suppose, last night. The Haldanes? No; I had no time."

"Robert, something worries you," she said earnestly. "Tell me what it is. Whatever it is, it will not be so heavy when you have told me. You have always said so—since ever we have been together."

"And truly, my darling," he said. He took her hand and held it tenderly, but he did not look at her. "I cannot tell you of worries that don't exist, can I?" he added, with an exaggerated cheerfulness. "I have to pay a little attention to business now the other men are out of town. And business bores me. I don't understand it. I am not clever at it. But it is not worth while to call it a worry. By-and-by they will come back, and I shall be free."

When he said this he really believed it, not being then fully aware of the tormenting power of the destruction which was about to overwhelm him. He thought the other directors would come back from their holidays, and that he himself would be able to plunge back into that abyss of ignorance which was bliss. But Helen did not believe it: not from any true perception of the state of affairs, but because she could not believe it was business at all that troubled him. Was Robert the kind of man to be disturbed about business? He who cared nothing for it but as a means, who liked money's worth, not money, whose mind was diametrically opposite to all the habits and traditions of trade? She would as soon have believed that her cousin Reginald Burton would be disturbed by a criticism or troubled to get a true balance of light and shade. No, it was not that. It was some *real* trouble which she did not know of, something that struck deeper than business, and was more important than anything that belonged to bank or market. Such were Helen's thoughts; they are the thoughts that come most natural to a woman; that he had been betrayed into some wrong-doing or inadvertent vice—that he had been tempted, and somehow gone astray. This, because it was so much more terrible than anything about business, was the bugbear that haunted her. It was to save her pain, as he thought, that poor Robert kept his secret from her. He did as so many men do, thinking it kindness; and thus left her with a host of horrible surmises to fight against, any one of which was (to her) harder than the truth. There is no way in which men, in their ignorance, inflict more harm upon women than this way. Helen watched in her fear and ignorance with a zealous eagerness that never lost a word, and gave exaggerated importance to many an idle incident. She

was doubly roused by her fear of the something coming, against which her defences would not stand, and by her absolute uncertainty what this something was. The three weeks her husband was in town by himself were like three years to her. Not that a shade of jealousy or doubt of his love to herself ever crossed her mind. She was too pure-minded, too proud, to be jealous. But something had come on him, some old trouble out of the past—some sudden horrible temptation; something, in short, which he feared to tell her. That money could be the cause of it, never crossed her thoughts.

And when she went home, things were no better; the house looked bare to her—she could not tell why. It was more than a month before she found out that the Perugino was gone, which was the light of her husband's eyes; and that little Madonna of the Umbrian school, which he delighted to think Raphael must have had some hand in, in his youth. This discovery startled her much; but worse had come before she made sure of that. The absence of the pictures was bewildering, but still more so was the change in her husband's habits. He would get up early, breakfast hurriedly before she had come down, and go out, leaving a message with the servants. Sometimes he went without breakfast. He avoided her, avoided the long evening talks they had loved, and even avoided her eye, lest she should read more in his face than he meant her to see. All this was terrible to Helen. The fears that overwhelmed her were ridiculous, no doubt; but amid the darkness and tragic gloom which surrounded her, what was she to think? Things she had read in books haunted her; fictitious visions which at this touch of personal alarm began to look real. She thought he might have to bribe some one who knew some early secret in his life, or some secret that was not his—something that belonged to his friends. Oh, if he would but tell her! She could bear anything—she could forgive the past, whatever it might be. She had no bitterness in her feelings towards her husband. She used to sit for hours together in his deserted studio, imagining scenes in which she found out, or he was driven to confide to her, this mystery; scenes of anguish, yet consolation. The studio became her favourite haunt. Was it possible that she had once entered it with languid interest, and been sensible of nothing but disappointment when she saw him working with his heart in his work? She would all round it now, making her little commu-

upon every picture. She would have given everything she had in the world to see him back there, painting those pictures with which she had been so dissatisfied—the Francesca, which still stood on its easel unfinished; the sketches of herself which she had once been so impatient of. The Francesca still stood there behind backs; but most of the others had been cleared away, and stood in little stacks against the walls. The floor was so orderly that it went to her heart to see it; nothing had been done, nothing disturbed, for weeks, perhaps months; the housemaid was free to go and come as if it had been a common parlour. All this was terribly sad to the painter's wife. The spring was coming on before she found the two sketches which afterwards she held so dearly. They bewildered her still more, and filled her with a thousand fears. One represented a pilgrim on a hilly road, in the twilight of a spring evening. Everything was soft in this picture, clear sky and twinkling stars above; a quiet rural path over the grass; but just in front of the pilgrim, and revealing his uplifted hands and horror-stricken countenance, the opening of a glowing horrible cavern—the mouth of Hell. The other was more mysterious still. It was a face full of anguish and love, with two clasped hands, looking up from the depths of a cave or well, to one blue spot of sky, one star that shone far above. Helen did not know what these sketches meant; but they made her shiver with wonder and apprehension. They were all that he had done this year.

And then something else, of a different kind, came in to bewilder her. Robert, who avoided her, who of evenings no longer talked over his affairs with her, and who probably had forgotten all her wants, let the quarter-day pass without supplying her, as he was in the habit of doing. So great a host of fears and doubts were between the two, that Helen did not remind him of his negligence. It pained her, but in a degree so different. What did that matter? But time went on, and it began to matter. She took her own little dividends, and kept silence; making what use of them she could to fill up the larger wants. She was as timid of speaking to him on this subject as if she had been a young girl. He had never obliged her to do so. She had been the general treasurer of the household in the old days; and even in recent times, he, who was so proud of his wife, had taken care to keep her always supplied with what she wanted. She never had needed to go to him to ask money, and she did not know how to begin.

Thus they both went their different way; suffering, perhaps, about equally. His time seemed to himself to be spent in a feverish round of interviews with people who could supply money, or wildly signing his name to papers which he scarcely understood—to bills which he could never dream of paying; they would be paid somehow when the time came, or they could be renewed, or something would be done, he was told. He had carried everything he could make money by away before this time; the title-deeds of his house, his pictures, even—and this was done with a very heavy heart—his policies of life insurance. Everything was gone. Events went faster as the crisis approached, and Drummond became conscious of little more than his wife's pale face wondering at him, with questioning eyes more pathetic than words, and Golden's face encouraging, or trying to encourage. Between the two was a wild abyss of work, of despair, of tiding over. Every escape more hairbreadth than the last! The wild whirl growing wilder! the awful end, ruin and fell destruction, coming nearer and more near!

It happened at length that Helen one day, in desperation, broke the silence. She came before him when he was on his way out, and asked him to wait, in a hollow voice.

"I don't want to trouble you," she said, "since you will not trust me, Robert. I have been trying not to harass you more; but—I have no money left—I am getting into debt—the servants want their wages. Robert—I thought you had forgotten—perhaps—"

He stood and looked at her for a moment, with his hat in his hand, ready to go out. How pale he was! How the lines had contracted in his face! He looked at her, trying to be calm. And then, as he stood, suddenly burst, without warning, into momentary terrible tears, of a passion she could not understand.

"Robert! oh, what is the matter?" she cried, throwing her arms round him. He put his head down on her shoulder, and held her fast, and regained control over himself, holding her to him as if she was something healing. In her great wonder and pity she raised his head with her hands, and gazed wistfully into his face through her tears. "Is it money?" she cried, with a great load taken off her heart. "Oh, Robert, tell me! Is that all?"

"All!" he said. "My God!" and then kissed her passionately, and put her away from him. "To-morrow," he said hoarsely,

"perhaps—I hope—I will tell you everything to-morrow." He did not venture to look at her again. He went out straight, without turning to the right or left. "The end must be near now," he said to himself audibly, as he went out like a blind man. To-morrow! Would to-morrow ever come? "The end must be near now."

The end was nearer than he thought.

When he reached the bank he found everything in disorder. Mr. Golden was not there, nor any one who could give information to the panic-stricken inquirers who were pouring in. It was said the manager had absconded. Rivers's was at an end. For the first ten minutes after Drummond heard the news that awaited him, it was almost a relief to know that the worst had come.



PART IV.

CHAPTER X.



IT was a relief for ten minutes, as every catastrophe is; the terrible suspense is cut short—the worst at least is known. But after those ten minutes are over, when the reality suddenly seizes upon the sufferer—when all the vague speechless

terrors which he had pushed off from him, with the hope that they might never come, arrive in a flood, and place themselves in one frightful circle round him, like furies, only not merciful enough to have a Medusa among them to freeze him into stone; when every shadowy gloomy prevision of evil which ever flashed across his mind, to be put away with a shudder, returns with the right of fact, to remain; when not only that thing has happened which has been his dread by day and the horror of his dreams, but a host of other things, circumstances which penetrate to every detail of his life, and affect every creature and every thing he loves, have followed in its train—when all this rushes upon a man after the first tranquillising stupor of despair, who or what is there that can console him? Poor Drummond was helpless in the midst of this great crash of ruin; he was so helpless that the thunder-stricken shareholders and excited clerks who had fallen upon him at first as the only authority to be found, let him slip from among them, hopeless of any help from him. They had driven him wild with questions and appeals—him, a poor fellow who could explain nothing, who had never been of much use except to denude himself of everything he possessed, and pledge his humble name, and be swept into ruin; but they soon saw the uselessness of the appeal. As soon as he

could disengage himself he stole away, drawing his hat over his eyes, feeling as if he were a criminal, with the sensation as of a hot fire burning in his heart, and buzzing and crackling in his ears. Was he a criminal? was it his doing? He was stunned by this terrible calamity; and yet, now that it had come, he felt that he had known it was coming, and everything about it, all his life. His whole existence had tended to this point since he was a boy; he knew it, he felt it, he even seemed to remember premonitions of it, which had come to him in his dreams from his earliest days. He went out into the streets in that dumb quiescent state which is so often the first consequence of a great calamity. He offered no remonstrance against his fate. He did not even say to himself that it was hard. He said nothing to himself, indeed, except to croon over, like a chorus, one endless refrain, "I knew this was how it would be!"

He wandered along, not knowing where he went, till he came to the river, and paused there, looking over the bridge. He did not even know what made him pause, until all at once the fancy jumped into his brain that it would be best to stop there, and cut in one moment the knotted, tangled thread which it was certain no effort of his could ever unravel. He stopped, and the suggestion flashed across him (whether out of his own mind, whether thrown at him by some mocking demon, who could tell?), and then shook his head sadly. No; it was broad day, and there would be a commotion, and he would be rescued—or if not, he, at least his body, would be rescued and carried to Helen, giving her a last association with him which it was insupportable to think of. No, no, he said to himself with a shudder, not now. Just then a hand was laid upon his shoulder; he turned round with the start of a man who feels that nothing is impossible, that everything that is terrible has become likely. Had it been a policeman to arrest him for having murdered somebody he would scarcely have been surprised. But it was not a policeman: it was Mr. Burton, fresh and clean and nicely dressed, newly come up from the country, in his light summer clothes, the image of prosperity and comfort, and cleanness, and self-satisfaction. A certain golden atmosphere surrounded the man of wealth, like the background on which

early painters set a saint; but there was nothing saintly about that apparition. Poor Drummond fell back more than he would have done had it been an arrest for murder. He gave an involuntary glance at himself, feeling, in contrast with Mr. Burton, as if he must look to the external eye the beggar he was, as if he must be dirty, tattered, miserable, with holes in his shoes and rags at his elbows. Perhaps his woebegone, excited face startled the smooth Philistine at his side as much as if those outward signs of wretchedness had been there.

"Good God, what have you been doing with yourself?" he cried.

"Nothing," said Drummond vaguely, and then by degrees his senses returned to him. "If you had been in town yesterday you might have helped us; but it does not matter. Shenken in Liverpool stopped payment yesterday," he went on, repeating drearily the dreary legend which he had heard at the bank. "And Rivers's—has stopped payment too."

"Good God!" said Mr. Burton again. It was a shock to him, as every event is when it comes. But he was not surprised. As for Robert, it did not occur to him to consider whether the other was surprised or not, or to be curious how it affected him. He turned his head away and looked at the river again. What attraction there remained for him in this world seemed to lie there.

"Drummond," said the merchant, looking at him with a certain alarm, "are you sure you know what you are saying? My God! Rivers's stopped payment! if you had said there had been an earthquake in London it would scarcely be as bad as that."

Robert did not make any reply. He nodded his head without looking round. What interested him was something black which kept appearing and disappearing in the middle of the turbid muddy stream. It was like a man's head he thought, and almost felt that he might have taken the plunge without knowing it, and that it might be himself.

"I have felt this was coming," said Burton. "I warned Golden you were going on in the wildest way. What could be expected when you fellows who know nothing about money would interfere? Good heavens! to think what a business that was; and all ruined in three years! Drummond! are you mad? Can't you turn round and speak to me? I am one of the shareholders, and I have a right to be answered how it was."

"Shall you lose much?" said Drummond dreamily, and he turned round without

meaning anything and looked in his companion's face. His action was simply fantastical, one of those motiveless movements which the sick soul so often makes; but it was quite unexpected by the other, who fell a step back, and grew red all over, and faltered in his reply.

"Much? I—I—don't know—what you call much. Good heavens, Drummond! are you mad? have you been drinking? Where is Golden?—he at least must know what he is about!"

"Yes," said the painter fiercely, "Golden knows what he is about—he has gone off, out of reach of questions—and you—oh—hound!" He gave a sudden cry and made a step forward. A sudden light seemed to burst upon him. He gazed with his dilated bloodshot eyes at the flushed countenance which could not face him. The attitude of the two men was such that the bystanders took note of it; two or three lingered and looked round holding themselves in readiness to interfere. The slight figure of the painter, his ghastly pale face and trembling hand, made him no antagonist for the burly well-to-do merchant; but English sentiment is always on the side of the portly and respectable, and Mr. Burton had an unmistakable air of fright upon his face. "Now, Drummond!—now, Drummond!" he said, with a certain pleading tone. The painter stood still, feeling as if a horrible illumination had suddenly flashed upon the man before him, and the history of their intercourse. He did in that moment of his despair what he could not have done with his ordinary intelligence. He made a rapid summary of the whole and saw how it was. Had he been happy, he would have been too friendly, too charitable, too kind in his thoughts to have drawn such a conclusion. But at this moment he had no time for anything but the terrible truth.

"I see it all," he said. "I see it all! It was ruined when you gave it over to us. I see it in every line of your face. Oh, hound! hounds all of you! skulking, dastardly demons, that kill a crowd of honest men to save yourselves—your miserable selves. I see it all!"

"Drummond! I tell you you are mad!"

"Hound!" said Robert again between his clenched teeth. He stood looking at him for a moment with his hands clenched too, and a sombre fire in his eyes. Whether he might have been led into violence had he stood there a moment longer it would be impossible to say. But all the habits of his life were against it, and his very despa

restrained him. When he had stood there for a second, he turned round suddenly on his heel without any warning, and almost knocking down a man who was keeping warily behind him ready for any emergency, went away in the opposite direction without saying a word. Burton stood still gazing after him with a mixture of consternation and concern, and something very like hatred. But his face changed when the spectators drew round him to wonder and question. "Something wrong with that poor gentleman, I fear, sir," said one. Mr. Burton put on a look of regret, sighed deeply, put his hand to his forehead, shook his head, murmured—"Poor fellow!" and—walked away. What could he do? He was not his brother's keeper, much less was he responsible for his cousin's husband—the paltry painter-fellow she had preferred to *him*. What would Helen think of her bargain now? Mad or drunk, it did not matter which—a pleasant companion for a woman. He preferred to think of this for the moment, rather than of the other question, which was in reality so much more important. Rivers's! Thank heaven he was no money loser, no more than was respectable. He had seen what was coming. Even to himself, this was all that Mr. Burton said. He hurried on, however, to learn what people were saying of it, with more anxiety in his mind than seemed necessary. He went to the bank itself with the air of a man going to a funeral. "The place I have known so long!" he said to another mournful victim who had appeared on the field of the lost battle, but who was not mad like Robert. "And to think that Golden should have betrayed your confidence! A man I have known since he was *that* height—a man I could have answered for with my life!"

Meanwhile Drummond strayed on he knew not where. He went back into the City, into the depths of those lanes and narrow streets which he had left so lately, losing himself in a bewildering maze of warehouse walls and echoing traffic. Great waggons jammed him up against the side, loads dangled over his head that would have crushed him in a moment, open cellars yawned for his unsteady feet; but he walked as safe through all those perils as if he had borne a charmed life, though he neither looked nor cared where he was going. His meeting with Burton was forced out of his mind in a few minutes as if it had not been. For the moment it had startled him into mad excitement; but so strong was the stupor of his despair, that in five minutes it was as if it had

never been. For hours he kept wandering round and round the scene of his ruin, coming and going in a circle, as if his feet were fast and he could not escape. It had been morning when he left his house. It was late afternoon when he got back. Oh why was it summer and the days so long? If only that scorching sun would have set and darkness fallen over the place. He stole in under cover of the lilac trees, which had grown so big and leafy, and managed to glide down the side way to the garden and get to the studio door, which he could open with his key. He had been doing nothing but think—think—all the time; but "now, at least, I shall have time to think," he said to himself, as he threw himself down on a chair close to the door—the nearest seat—it no longer mattered where he placed himself or how. He sat huddled up against the wall as sometimes a poor model did, waiting wistfully to know if he was wanted,—some poor wretch to whom a shilling was salvation. This fancy, with a thousand others equally inappropriate, flashed across his mind as he sat there, still with his hat pulled down on his brows in the sunny luxurious warmth of the afternoon. The mere atmosphere, air, and sky, and sunshine would have been paradise to the artist in the poorest time he had ever known before, but they did not affect him now. He sat there in his stupor for perhaps an hour, not even able to rouse himself so far as to shut the door of communication into the conservatory, through which he heard now and then the softened stir of the household. He might have been restored to the sense of life and its necessities, might have been brought back out of the delirium of his ruin at that moment, had any one in the house known he was there. Helen was in the drawing-room, separated from him only by that flowery passage which he had made for her, to tempt her to visit him at his work. She was writing notes, inviting some half-dozen people to dinner, as had been arranged between them, but with a heavy and anxious heart, full of misgiving. She had risen from her writing table three or four times to go to the window and look out for her husband, wondering why he should be so long of coming—while he sat so near her. Mrs. Drummond's heart was very heavy. She did not understand what he had said to her in the morning—could not imagine how it could be. It must be a temporary cloud, a failure of some speculation, something unconnected with the ordinary course of life, she said to herself. Money!—he was not a business man—it could not be money. If it

was only money, why that was nothing. Such was the course of her thoughts. And she paused over her invitations, wondering was it right to give them if Robert had been losing money. But they were old friends whom she was inviting—only half a dozen people—and it was for his birthday. She had just finished the last note, when Norah came dancing into the room, claiming her mother's promise to go out with her; and after another long gaze from her window, Helen made up her mind to go. It was her voice speaking to the maid which roused Robert. "If Mr. Drummond comes in before I return," he heard her say, "tell him I shall not be long. I am going with Miss Norah to the Gardens for an hour, and then to ask for Mr. Haldane; but I shall be back by half-past six." He heard the message—he for whom it was intended—and rose up softly and went to his studio window, and peeped stealthily out to watch them as they went away. Norah came first, with a skip and gambol, and then Helen. His wife gave a wistful look back at the house as she opened the little gate under the leafy dusty lilacs. Was it with some premonition of what she should find when she came back? He hid himself so that he could not be seen, and gazed at the two, feeling as if that moment was all that life had yet to give him. It was his farewell look. His wife and child disappeared, and he could hear their footsteps outside on the pavement going farther and farther away on their harmless, unimportant walk, while he— He woke up as if it had been out of sleep or out of a trance. She would return by half-past six, and it was now approaching five. For all he had to do there was so little, so very little time.

So he said to himself, and yet when he said it he had no clear idea what he was going to do. He had not only to do it, whatever it was, but to make up his mind, all in an hour and a half; and for the first five minutes of that little interval he was like a man dreaming, stretching out his hands to catch any straw, trying to believe he might yet be saved. Could he leave them—those two who had just left the door—to struggle through the rest of life by themselves? Helen was just over thirty, and her daughter nearly twelve. It was a mature age for a woman; but yet for a woman who has been protected and taken care of all her life, how bitter a moment to be left alone!—the moment when life is at its fullest, demands most, feels most warmly, and has as yet given up nothing. Helen had had no training to teach her that

happiness was not her right. She had felt it to be her right, and her whole soul rose up in rebellion against any infringement of that great necessity of being. How was she to live when all was taken from her, even the support of her husband's arm? Robert had never known so much of his wife's character before, but in this awful moment it became clear to him as by an inspiration. How was she to bear it? Credit, honour, money, living—and her husband, too, who could still work for her, shield her. He went to his easel and uncovered the half-finished picture on it, and gazed at it with something that was in reality a dumb appeal to the dumb canvas to help him. But it did not help him. On the contrary, it brought suddenly up before him his work of the past, his imperfect successes, and Helen's kind, veiled, hidden, but unconcealable dissatisfaction. The look of suppressed pain in her face, the subdued tone, the soft languid praise of some detail or accessory, the very look of her figure when she turned away from it, came all before him. Her habit was, when she turned away, to talk to him of other things. How clearly that oft-repeated scene came before him in his despair! She was dutiful, giving him her attention conscientiously as long as was needful; but when he fell back into the fond babble of the maker, and tried to interest her in some bit of drapery, or effect of light, or peculiarity of grouping, she would listen to him sweetly, and—change the subject as soon as possible. It all returned to him—he remembered even the trivial little words she had spoken, the languid air of half fatigue which would come over her. That—along with the meagrest poverty, the hardest homely struggles for daily bread. Could she bear to go back to it? She would lose everything, the house and all that was in it, everything that could be called his or supposed his. The only thing that could not be taken from her would be her £100 a year, her little fortune which was settled on her. "They could live on that," poor Drummond went on in his dreary miserable thoughts. "They could exist, it is possible, better without me than with me. Would they be happier to have me in prison, disgraced, and dishonoured, a drag hanging about their neck—or to hear the worst at once, to know that everything was over, that at least their pittance would be theirs, and their peace respected? Everything would be over. Nobody could have any pretext for annoying her about it. They would be sorry for her—even they would be sorry for me. My policies would

go to make up something—to clear my name a little. And they would let her alone. She could go to the country. She is so simple in her real tastes. They could live on what she has, if they were only rid of me.” A sigh that was almost a sob interrupted him in his musing. He was so worn out; and was it the grave-chill that was invading him already and making him shiver? He took the canvas on the easel and held it up to the light. “The drawing is good enough,” he said to himself, “it is not the drawing. She always owns that. It is—something else. And how can I tell after this that I could even draw? I could not now, if I were to try. My hand shakes like an old man’s. I might fall ill like poor Haldane. Ah, my God!” The canvas fell out of his hands upon the floor—a sudden spasm contracted his heart. Haldane! It was the first time that day that he had thought of him. His ruin would be the ruin of his friend too—his friend who was helpless, sick and yet the support of others. “Oh, my God, my God!” he wailed with a cry of despair.

And there was no one near to hear him, no one to defend him from himself and from the devil, to lay hands upon him, to bid him live and hope and work, and help them to exist whom he had helped to ruin. He was left all alone in that moment of his agony. God, to whom he had appealed, was beyond the clouds, beyond that which is more unfathomable than any cloud, the serene, immeasurable, impenetrable blue, and held out no hand, sent no voice of comfort. The man fell down where his work had fallen, prone upon the ground, realising in a moment all the misery of the years that were to come. And it was his doing, his doing!—though consciously he would have given himself to be cut to pieces, would have toiled his life out, to make it up now to his friend,—how much more to his wife! What passed in his mind in that awful interval is not to be told. It was the supreme struggle between life and despair, and it was despair that won. When he rose up his face was like the face of an old man, haggard and furrowed with deep lines. He stood still for a moment, looking round him vaguely, and then made a little pilgrimage round the room, looking at everything, with a motive, without a motive, who can tell? his whole faculties absorbed in the exaltation, and bewildering, sombre excitement of such a crisis as can come but once to any man. Then he sat down at his writing-table, and sought out some letter-paper (there were so many scraps of drawing-paper that came first to

hand), and slowly wrote a few lines. He had to search for a long time before he could find an envelope to enclose this, and his time was getting short. At last he put it up, and, after another pause, stole through the conservatory, walking stealthily like a thief, and placed the white envelope on a little crimson table, where it shone conspicuous to everybody who should enter. He did more than that; he went and bent over the chair which Helen had pushed away when she rose from it—the chair she always sat on—and kissed it. There was a little bright-coloured handkerchief lying on the sofa, which was *Norah’s*. He took that up and kissed it too, and thrust it into his breast. Did he mean to carry it with him into the dark and silent country where he was going? God knows what was the thought in his mind. The pretty clock on the mantelpiece softly chimed the quarter as he did this, and he started like a thief. Then he took an old great-coat from the wall, an old travelling hat, which hung beside it, and went back to the studio. There was no more time for thought. He went out, leaving the door unlocked, brushing stealthily through the lilacs. The broad daylight played all around him, revealing him to every one, showing to the world how he stole away out of his own house. He had put up the collar of his coat, and drawn his hat down over his brows to disguise himself in case he met any one he knew. Any one he knew! It was in case he met his wife, to whom he had just said farewell for ever, and his child, whose little kerchief he was going to take with him into this dismal ruin, into the undiscovered world.

All this might have been changed had he met them; and they were crossing the next street coming home, Helen growing more and more anxious as they approached the door. Had he been going out about some simple everyday business, of course they would have met; but not now, when it might have saved one life from destruction and another from despair. He had watched for a moment to make sure they were not in sight before he went out; and the servants had caught a glimpse of a man whom they did not recognise hiding among the bushes, and were frightened; so, it turned out afterwards, had various other passers-by. But Drummond saw no one—no one. The multitudes in the noisier streets upon which he emerged after a while, were nothing to him. They pushed against him, but he did not see them; the only two figures he would have seen were henceforward to be invisible to him for ever.

For ever! for ever! Was it for ever? Would this crime he was about to commit, this last act of supreme rebellion against the will of that God to whom he seemed to have appealed in vain, would it sever him from them not only in this world, but in the world to come? Should he have to gaze upward, like poor Dives, and see, in the far serene above him, these two walking in glory and splendour, who were no longer his? perhaps surrounded by angels, stately figures of the blessed, without a thought to spare in the midst of that glory for the poor soul who perished for love of them. Could that be true? Was it damnation as well as death he was going to face? Was it farewell for ever, and ever, and ever?

So the awful strain ran on, buzzing in his ears, drowning for him the voices of the crowd—for ever, for ever, for ever. Dives forlorn and far away—and up, up high in the heavens, blazing above him, like a star——

Like that star in the soft sky of the evening which came out first and shone down direct upon him in his wretchedness. How it shone! How she shone!—was it she?—as it grew darker drawing a silver line for him upon the face of the darkening water. Was that to be the spot? But it took years to get dark that night. He lived and grew old while he was waiting thus to die. At last there was gloom enough. He got a boat, and rowed it out to that white glistening line, the line that looked like a silver arrow, shining where the spot was——

The boat drifted ashore that night as the tide fell. In that last act, at least, Nature helped him to be honest, poor soul!

CHAPTER XL

"THE studio door is open, mamma," said little Norah dancing in before her mother, through the lilac bushes. The words seemed to take a weight off Helen's heart.

"Then papa must have come in," she said, and ran up the steps to the door, which was opened before she could knock by an anxious, half-frightened maid. "Mr. Drummond has come in?" she said, in her anxiety, hasting to pass Jane, who held fast by the door.

"No, ma'am, please, ma'am; but Rebecca and me see a man about not five minutes ago, and I can't find master's topcoat as was a-hanging in the hall—Rebecca says, ma'am, as she thought she see——"

"Papa has not been home after all," Helen said to her little daughter; "perhaps Mr. Drummond wore his great-coat last night,

Jane. Never mind just now; he will tell us when he comes in."

"But I see the man, and George was out, as he always is when he's wanted. Me and Rebecca——" said Jane.

"Never mind just now," said Helen languidly. She went into the drawing-room with the load heavier than ever on her heart. What could have kept him so long? What could be making him so miserable? Oh, how cruel, cruel it was not to know! She sat down with a heart like lead on that chair which poor Robert had kissed—not fifteen minutes since, and he was scarcely out of reach now.

"Oh, mamma," cried Norah, moving about with a child's curiosity; "here is a letter for you on the little red table. It is so funny, and blurred, and uneven. I can write better than that—look! isn't it from papa?"

Helen had not paid much attention to what the child said, but now she started up and stretched out her hand. The name on the outside was scarcely legible, it was blurred and uneven, as Norah said; and it was very clear to see, could only be a message of woe. But her worst fears, miserable as she felt, had not approached the very skirts of the misery that now awaited her. She tore the envelope open, with her heart beating loud in her ears, and her whole body tingling with agitation. And this was what she read:—

"MY HELEN, MY OWN HELEN,—I have nothing in the world to do now but to bid you good-bye. I have ruined you, and Norah more than you. If I lived I should only be a disgrace and a burden, and your little money that you have will support you by yourself. Oh, my love, to think I should leave you like this! I who have loved you so. But I have never been good enough for you. When you are an angel in heaven, if you see me among the lost, oh, bestow a little pity upon me, my Helen! I shall never see you again, but as Dives saw Lazarus. Oh, my wife, my baby, my own, you will be mine no longer; but have a little pity upon me! Give me one look, Helen, out of heaven.

"I am not mad, dear. I am doing it knowing it will be for the best. God forgive me if I take it upon me to know better than Him. It is not presumption, and perhaps He may know what I mean, though even you don't know. Oh my own, my darlings, my only ones—good-bye, good-bye!"

There was no name signed, no stops to make the sense plain. It was written as

wildly as it had been conceived; and Helen, in her terrible excitement, did not make out at first what it could mean. What could it mean? where was he going? The words about Dives and Lazarus threw no light upon it at first. He had gone away. She gave a cry, and dropped her hands upon her lap, with the letter in them, and looked round her—looked at her child, to make sure to herself that she was not dreaming. Gone away! But where, where, and why this parting? “I don’t understand it—he has gone and left us,” she said feebly, when Norah, in her curiosity, came rushing to her to know what it was. “I don’t know what it means. O God, help us!” she said, with an outburst of miserable tears. She was confused to the very centre of her being. Where had he gone?

“May I read it, mamma?” little Norah asked, with her arms round her mother’s neck.

But Helen had the feeling that it was not fit for the child. “Run and ask who brought it,” she said, glad to be alone; and then read over again, with a mind slowly awakening to its reality, that outburst of love and despair. The letter shook in her hands, salt tears fell upon it as she read. “If I lived:—*I am doing it, knowing.*” God, God, what was it he had gone to do? Just then she heard a noise in the studio, and starting to her feet rushed to the conservatory door, crying, “Robert! Robert!” She was met by Jane and Norah, coming from it; the child was carrying her father’s hat in her arms, with a strange look of wonder and dismay on her face.

“Mamma, no one brought the letter,” she said in a subdued, horror-struck tone; “and here is papa’s hat—and the picture is lying dashed down on the floor with its face against the carpet. It is all spoiled, mamma,” sobbed little Norah—“papa’s picture! and here is his hat. Oh, mamma, mamma!”

Norah was frightened at her mother’s face. She had grown ghastly pale. “Get me a cab,” she said to the maid, whose curiosity was profoundly excited. Then she sat down and took her child in her arms. “Norah, my darling,” she said, making a pause between every two words, “something dreadful has happened. I don’t know what. I must go—and see. I must go—and find him—O my God, where am I to go?”

“And me, too,” said the child, clinging to her fast; “me, too—let us go to the City, mamma!”

“Not you, Norah. It will soon be your bedtime. Oh, my pet, go and kneel down and pray—pray for poor papa.”

“I can pray just as well in the cab,” said

Norah; “God hears all the same. I am nearly twelve—I am almost grown up. You shall not, shall not go without me. I will never move nor say a word. I will run up and get your cloak and mine. We’ll easily find him. He never would have the heart to go far away from you and me.”

“He never would have the heart,” Helen murmured the words over after her. Surely not. Surely, surely he would not have the heart! His resolution would fail. How could he go and leave the two whom he loved best—the two whom alone he loved in this world. “Run, then, dear, and get your cloak,” she said faintly. The child seemed a kind of anchor to her, holding her to something, to some grasp of solid earth. They drove off in a few minutes, Norah holding fast her mother’s hand. They overtook, if they had but known it, and passed in the crowd, the despairing man they sought; and he with his dim eyes saw the cab driving past, and wondered even who was in it—some other sufferer, in the madness of excitement or despair. How was he to know it was his wife and child? They drove to the City, but found no one there. They went to his club, to one friend’s house after another, to the picture-dealers, to the railway stations. There, two or three bystanders had seen such a man, and he had gone to Brighton, to Scotland, to Paris, they said. Coming home, they drove over the very bridge where he had been standing waiting for the dark. It was dark by that time, and Helen’s eye caught the line of light on the water, with that intuitive wish so common to a painter’s wife, that Robert had seen it. Ah, good Lord! he had seen and more than seen. The summer night was quite dark when they got home. Those gleams of starlight were lost in clouds, and all was gloom about the pretty house. Instead of the usual kindly gleam from the windows, nothing was visible as they drew up to the door but the light of a single candle which showed its solitary flame through the bare window of the dining-room. No blind was drawn, or curtain closed, and like the taper of a watcher shone this little miserable light. It chilled Helen in her profound discouragement and fatigue, and yet it gave her a forlorn hope that perhaps he had come. Norah had fallen fast asleep leaning against her. It was all she could do to wake the child as they approached the door; and Jane came out to open the gate with a scared face. “No, ma’am, master’s never been back,” she answered to Helen’s eager question; “but Dr. Maurice, he’s here.”

Mrs. Drummond put Norah into the woman's arms, and rushed into the house. Dr. Maurice met her with a face almost as white as her own, and took her hands compassionately. "You have heard from him? What have you heard? where is he?" said poor Helen.

"Hush, hush!" he said, "perhaps it is not so bad as it appears. I don't understand it. Rest a little, and I will show you what he has written to me."

"I cannot rest," she said; "how can I rest when Robert— Let me see it. Let me see it. I am sure to understand what he means. He never had any secrets before. Oh, show it me—show it me!—am not I his wife?"

"Poor wife, poor wife!" said the compassionate doctor, and then he put her into an easy-chair and went and asked for some wine. "I will show it you only when you have drunk this," he said; "only when you have heard what I have to say. Drummond is very impulsive you know. He might not do really as he said. A hundred things would come in to stop him when he had time to think. His heart has been broken by this bank business; but when he felt that it was understood he was not to blame——"

"Give me your letter," she said, holding out her hand to him. She was capable of no more.

"He would soon find that out," said the doctor. "Who could possibly blame him? My dear Mrs. Drummond, you must take this into account. You must not give him up at once. I have set on foot all sorts of inquiries——"

"The letter, the letter!" she said hoarsely, holding out her hand.

He was obliged to yield to her at last, but not without the consciousness which comforted him that she had heard a great deal of what he had to say. She had not listened voluntarily; but still she had not been able to keep herself from hearing. This was not much comfort to poor Helen, but it was to him. He had made her swallow the wine too; he had done his best for her; and now he could but stand by mournfully while she read her sentence, the words which might be death.

"Maurice, I want you to go to my wife. Before you get this, or at least before you have got to her, I shall be dead. It's a curious thing to say, but it's true. There has been a great crash at the bank, and I am ruined and all I care for. If I lived I could do no good, only harm; but they will be sorry for her if I die. I have written to her, poor darling, to

tell her; but I want you to go and stand by her. She'll want some one; and kiss the child for me. If they find me, bury me anywhere. I hope they will never find me, though, for Helen's sake. And poor Haldane. Tell him I knew nothing of it; nothing, nothing! I would have died sooner than let them risk his money. God help us, and God forgive me! Maurice, you are a good fellow; be kind to my poor wife."

There was a postscript which nobody read or paid any attention to: that is to say, they read it and it died from their minds for the moment as if it meant nothing. It was this, written obliquely like an after-thought—

"The bank was ruined from the first; there was never a chance for us. I found this out only to-day. Burton and Golden have done it all."

These were the words that Helen read, with Dr. Maurice standing mournfully behind watching her every movement. She kept staring at the letter for a long time, and then fell back with a hysterical sob, but without any relief of tears. Dr. Maurice stood by her as his friend had asked him. He soothed her, adding every possible reason he could think of (none of which he himself believed in the smallest degree) to show that "poor Drummond" might change his mind. This was written in the first impulse of despair, but when he came to think—— Helen did not listen; but she heard what Dr. Maurice said vaguely, and she heard his account of what he had done; he had given information at once to the police; he had engaged people everywhere to search and watch. News would be heard of him to-morrow certainly, if not to-night. Helen rose while he was speaking. She collected herself and restrained herself, exerting all the strength she possessed. "Will you come with me?" she said.

"Where? where? Mrs. Drummond, I entreat you to believe I have done everything——"

"Oh, I am sure of it!" she said faintly; "but I must go. I cannot——cannot rest. I must go somewhere——anywhere——where he may have gone——"

"But, Mrs. Drummond——"

"You are going to say I have been everywhere. So we have, Norah and I——she fell asleep at last, poor child——she does not need me——I must go——"

"It is getting late," he said; "it is just ten; if news were to come you would not like to be out of the way. Stay here and rest, and I will go to-morrow; you will want all your strength."



"THE BANK WAS RUINED FROM THE FIRST."

"I want it all now," she said, with a strange smile. "Who thinks of to-morrow? it may never, never come. It may—— You are very kind—but I cannot rest."

She was in the cab again before he could say another word. But fortunately at that moment one of his messengers came in hot haste to say that they thought that they had found some trace of "the gentleman." He had come off to bring the news, and probably by this time the others were on their way bringing him home. This intelligence furnished Maurice with a weapon against Helen. She allowed herself to be led into the house again, not believing it, feeling in her heart that her husband would never be brought back, yet unable to resist the reasonable conclusion that she must stay to receive him. The short summer darkness passed over her thus; the awful dawn came and looked her in the face. One of the maids sat up, or rather dozed in her chair in the kitchen, keeping a fire alight in case anything might be

wanted. And Helen sat and listened to every sound; sat at the window gazing out, hearing carriage-wheels and footsteps miles off, as it seemed to her, and now and then almost deceived into hope by the sound of some one returning from a dance or late party. How strange it seemed to her that life should be going on in its ordinary routine, and people enjoying themselves, while she sat thus frozen into desperation, listening for him who would never come again! Her mind was wandering after him through every kind of dreadful scene; and yet it was so difficult, so impossible to associate him with anything terrible. He, always so reasonable, so tender of others, so free from selfish folly. The waking of the new day stole upon the watcher before she was aware; those sounds which are so awful in their power, which show how long it is since last night, how life has gone on, casting aside old burdens, taking on new ones. It was just about ten o'clock, when the morning was at its busiest outside, and Helen, refusing

to acknowledge the needs of the new day, still sat at the window watching with eyes that were dry and hot and bloodshot, with the room all in mournful disorder round her, when Dr. Maurice's brougham drew up to the door. He sprang out of it, carrying a coat on his arm; a rough fellow in a blue Jersey and sailor's hat followed him. Maurice came in with that look so different from the look of anxiety, that fatal air, subdued and still and certain, which comes only from knowledge. Whatever might have happened he was in doubt no more.

Helen's long vigil had worn her into that extremity of emotion which can no longer avail itself of ordinary signs. She had not even risen to meet the news. She held out her hand feebly, and gave him a piteous look of inquiry, which her dry lips refused to sound. She looked as if it were possible that she had grown into an idiot as she sat there. He came forward to her and took her hand in his.

"Dear Mrs. Drummond," he said, "you will need all your courage; you must not give way; you must think of your child."

"I know," she said; her hand dropped out of his as if by its mere weight. She bowed her head as if to let this great salt bitter wave go over her—bowed it down till it sank upon her lap hidden in her clasped hands. There was nothing to be said further, not a word was necessary. She knew.

And yet there was a story to tell. It was told to her very gently, and she had to listen to it, with her face hidden in her hands. She shuddered now and then as she listened. Sometimes a long convulsive sob escaped her, and shook her whole frame; but she was far beyond the ordinary relief of weeping. It was poor Robert's coat which Dr. Maurice had brought with him, making all further doubt impossible. The gentleman had thrown it off when he took that boat at Chelsea. It was too warm, he said; "and sure enough it was mortal warm," the man added who had come to verify the mournful story. The gentleman had taken a skiff for a row. It was a clear, beautiful night, and he

had been warned to keep out of the way of steamers and barges. If any harm came to him, the boatman said, it was not for want of knowing how to manage a boat. The little skiff had drifted in bottom up, and had been found that morning a mile down stream. That was all. Jane, who was the housemaid, went away crying, and drew down all the blinds except that of the room in which her mistress was. "Surely missis will have the thought to do that," she said. But poor Helen had not the thought.

And thus it all came to an end—their love, their prosperity, and that mitigated human happiness which they had enjoyed together—happiness not too perfect, and yet how sweet! Norah still slept through the bright morning, neglected by her usual attendant, and tired out by her unusual exertions on the previous night. "She ought to know," the maids said to each other, with that eagerness to make evil tidings known which is so strangely common; but the old nurse, who loved the child, would not have her disturbed. It was only when Helen rejected all their entreaties to lie down and rest that Martin consented to rouse the little girl. She came down, with her bright hair all about her shoulders, wrapped in a little white dressing-gown, flying with noiseless bare feet down the staircase, and, without a word of warning, threw herself upon her mother. It was not to console her mother, but to seek her own natural refuge in this uncomprehended calamity. "Oh, mamma!" said Norah; "oh, mamma, mamma!" She could find no other words of consolation. Torrents of youthful tears gushed from the child's eyes. She wept for both, while Helen sat tearless. And the blinds were not down nor the shutters closed in that room, as the servants recollected with horror, and the great golden light of morn shone in.

Thus they were left undisturbed in the full day, in the sweet sunshine; scarcely knowing, in the first stupor of misery, how it was the darkness had gathered in the midst of all their world of light.



PART V.



“GOLDEN! WHERE IS HE?” CRIED MAURICE. “THE FELLOW WHO HANDED. BY JOVE, TELL ME BUT WHERE TO LAY MY HANDS ON HIM——” (See page 56.)

CHAPTER XII.

HELEN had not remarked that postscript to her husband's letter, but Dr. Maurice had done so, to whom it was addressed; and while she was hiding her head and bearing the first agony of her grief without thought of anything remaining that she might yet have to bear, many things had been going on in the world outside of which Helen knew nothing. Dr. Maurice had been Robert's true friend; and after that mournful morning a day and night had passed in which he did not know how to take comfort. He

had no way of expressing himself as women have. He could not weep; it even seemed to him that to close out the cheerful light, as he was tempted to do (for the sight of all that brightness made his heart sick), would have been an ostentation of sorrow, a show of sentiment which he had no right to indulge in. He could not weep, but there was something else he could do; and that was to sift poor Robert's accusation, if there was any truth in it; and, if there was, pursue—to he could not tell what end—the murderers of his friend. It is the old savage way; ar-

Dr. Maurice set his teeth, and found a certain relief in the thought. He lay down on the sofa in his library, and ordered his servant to close his doors to all the world, and tried to snatch a little sleep after the watch of the previous night. But sleep would not come to him. The library was a large, lofty room, well furnished, and full with books. It was red curtained and carpeted, and the little bit of the wall which was not covered with book-cases was red too, red which looked dark and heavy in the May sunshine, but was very cozy in winter days. The one spot of brightness in the room was a picture of poor Drummond's—a young picture, one of those which he was painting while he courted Helen, the work of youth and love at a time when the talent in him was called promise, and that which it promised was genius. This little picture caught the doctor's eye as he lay on his sofa, resting the weary frame which had known no rest all night. A tear came as he looked at it—a tear which flowed back again to its fountain, not being permitted to fall, but which did him good all the same. "Poor fellow! he never did better than that," Dr. Maurice said to himself with a sigh; and then he closed up his eyes tight, and tried to go to sleep. Half an hour after, when he opened them again, the picture was once more the first thing he saw. "Better!" he said, "he never did so well. And killed by those infernal curs!" The doctor took himself off his sofa after this failure. It was of no use trying to sleep. He gathered his boots from the corner into which he had hurled them, and drew them on again. He thought he would go and have a walk. And then he remarked for the first time that though he had taken his coat off, the rest of his dress was the same as he had put on last night to go out to dinner. When he went to his room to change this, the sight of himself in the glass was a wonder to him. Was that red-eyed, dishevelled man, with glittering studs in his shirt, and a head heavy with watching and grief—was that the trim and irreproachable Dr. Maurice? He gave a grin of horror and fierce mockery at himself, and then sat down in his easy-chair, and hid his face in his hands; and thus, all contorted and doubled up, went to sleep unawares. He was good for nothing that day.

The next morning, before he could go out, Mr. Burton called upon him. He was the man whom Dr. Maurice most wanted to see. Yet he felt himself jump as he was announced, and knew that in spite of himself his counten-

ance had changed. Mr. Burton came in undisturbed in manner or appearance, but with a broad black hatband on his hat—a band which his hatter had assured him was much broader than he had any occasion for—"deep enough for a brother." This gave him a certain air of solemnity, as it came in in front of him. It was "a mark of respect" which Dr. Maurice had not thought of showing; and Maurice, after poor Haldane, was, as it were, Robert's next friend.

"I have come to speak to you about poor Drummond," said Mr. Burton, taking a chair. "What a terrible business this has been! I met with him accidentally that morning—the very day it happened. I do not know when I have had such a shock!"

"You met him on the day he took his life?"

"The day he—died, Dr. Maurice. I am his relative, his wife's nearest friend. Why should we speak so? Let us not be the people to judge him. He died—God knows how. It is in God's hands."

"God knows I don't judge him," said Dr. Maurice; and there was a pause.

"I cannot hear that any one saw him later," said Mr. Burton. "I hear from the servants at St. Mary's Road that he was not there. He talked very wildly, poor fellow. I almost thought—God forgive me!—that he had been drinking. It must have been temporary insanity. It is a kind of consolation to reflect upon that now."

The doctor said nothing. He rustled his papers about, and played impatiently with the pens and paper-cutter on his table. He bore it all until his visitor heaved a demonstrative sigh. That he could not bear.

"If you thought he spoke wildly, you might have looked after him a little," he said. "It was enough to make any man look wild; and you, who knew so well all about it—"

"That is the very thing. I did not know about it. I had been out of town, and had heard nothing. A concern I was so much interested in—by which I am myself a loser—"

"Do you lose much?" said Dr. Maurice, looking him in the face. It was the same question poor Robert had asked, and it produced the same results. An uneasy flush came on the rich man's countenance.

"We City men do not publish our losses," he said. "We prefer to keep the amount of them, when we can, to ourselves. You were in yourself, I believe? Ah! I warned poor Drummond! I told him he knew nothing

of business. He should have taken the advice of men who knew. How strange that an ignorant, inexperienced man, quite unaware what he was doing, should be able to ruin such a vast concern!"

"Ruin such a vast concern!" Dr. Maurice repeated, stupefied. "Who?—Drummond? This is a serious moment and a strangely-chosen subject for a jest. I can't suppose that you take me for a fool——"

"We have all been fools, letting him play with edge tools," said Mr. Burton, almost sharply. "Golden tells me he would never take advice. Golden says——"

"Golden! where is he?" cried Maurice. "The fellow who absconded? By Jove, tell me but where to lay my hands on him——"

"Softly," said Mr. Burton, putting his hand on Maurice's arm, with an air of soothing him which made the doctor's blood boil. "Softly, doctor. He is to be found where he always was, at the office, making the best he can of a terribly bad job, looking fifteen years older, poor fellow. Where are you going? Let me have my ten minutes first!"

"I am going to get hold of him, the swindler!" cried Maurice, ringing the bell furiously. "John, let the brougham be brought round directly. My God! if I was not the most moderate man in existence I should say murderer too. Golden says, forsooth! We shall see what he will say before a jury——"

"My dear Dr. Maurice—listen a little—take care what you are doing. Golden is as honourable a man as you or I——"

"Speak for yourself," said the doctor roughly. "He has absconded—that's the word. It was in the papers yesterday morning; and it was the answer I myself received at the office. Golden, indeed! If you're a friend of Drummond's, you will come with me and give that fellow into custody. This is no time for courtesy now."

"How glad I am I came!" said Mr. Burton. "You have not seen, then, what is in the papers to-day? Dr. Maurice, you must listen to me; this is simply madness. Golden, poor fellow, has been very nearly made the victim of his own unsuspecting character. Don't be impatient, but listen. When I tell you he was simply absent on Tuesday on his own affairs—gone down to the country, as I might have been myself, if not, alas! as I sometimes think, sent out of the way. The news of Shenken's bankruptcy arrived that morn'g. Well, I don't mean to say Drummond could have helped that; but he seized the opportunity. Heaven knows how sorry I am to suggest such a thing; it has nearly

broken Golden's heart. But these are the facts; what can you make of them? Maurice, listen to me. What did he go and do *that* for? He was still a young man; he had his profession. If he could have faced the world, why did he do *that*?"

Dr. Maurice replied with an oath. I can make no excuse for him. He stood on his own hearth, with his hand clenched, and blasphemed. There are moments in which a man must either do that, or go down upon his knees and appeal to God, who nowadays sends no lightning from heaven to kill the slayer of men's souls where he stands. The doctor saw it all as if by a gleam of that same lightning which he invoked in vain. He saw the spider's web they had woven, the way of escape for themselves which they had built over the body of the man who was dead, and could not say a word in reply. But his friend could not find a word to say. Scorn, rage, stupefaction, came upon him. It was so false, so incredible in its falsity. He could no more have defended Robert from such an accusation than he would have defended himself from the charge of having murdered him. But it would be believed: the world did not know any better. He could not say another word—such a horror and disgust came over him, such a sickening sense of the power of falsehood, the feebleness of manifest, unprovable truth.

"This is not a becoming way in which to treat such a subject," said Mr. Burton, rising too. "No subject could be more painful to me. I feel almost as if, indirectly, I myself was to blame. It was I who introduced him into the concern. I am a busy man, and I have a great deal on my hands, but could I have foreseen what was preparing for Rivers's, my own interest should have gone to the wall. And that he should be my own relation too—my cousin's husband! Ah, poor Helen, what a mistake she made!"

"Have you nearly done, sir?" said the doctor fiercely.

"I shall have done at once, if what I say is received with incivility," said Mr. Burton, with spirit. "It was to prevent any extension of the scandal that I came here."

"There are some occasions upon which civility is impossible," said Maurice. "I happen to know Robert Drummond; which I hope you don't, for your own sake. And, remember, a great many people know him besides me. I mean no incivility when I say that I don't believe one word of this, Mr. Burton; and that is all I have to say about it. Not one word——"

"You mean, I lie!"

"I mean nothing of the sort. I hope you are deceived. I mean that this fellow Golden is an atrocious scoundrel, and *he* lies, if you will. And having said that, I have not another word to say."

Then they both stopped short, looking at each other. A momentary doubt was, perhaps, in Burton's mind what to say next—whether to pursue the subject or to let it drop. But no doubt was in Maurice's. He stood rigid, with his back to the vacant fireplace, retired within himself. "It is very warm," he said; "not favourable weather for walking. Can I set you down anywhere? I see my brougham has come round."

"Thanks," said the other shortly. And then he added, "Dr. Maurice, you have taken things in a manner very different from what I expected. I thought you would take an interest in saving our poor friend's memory as far as we can—"

"I take no interest in it, sir, whatever."

"And the feelings of his widow," said Mr. Burton. "Well, well, very well. Friendship is such a wide word—sometimes meaning so much, sometimes so little. I suppose I must do the best I can for poor Helen by myself, and in my own way."

The obdurate doctor bowed. He held fast by his formula. He had not another word to say.

"In that case I need not trouble you any longer," said Mr. Burton. But when he was on his way to the door he paused and turned round. "She is not likely to be reading the papers just now," he said, "and I hope I may depend on you not to let these unfortunate particulars, or anything about it, come to the ears of Mrs. Drummond. I should like her to be saved that if possible. She will have enough to bear."

"I shall not tell Mrs. Drummond," said the doctor. And then the door opened and closed, and the visitor was gone.

The brougham stood before Dr. Maurice's window for a long time that morning. The old coachman grumbled broiling on the box; the horses grumbled, pawing with restless feet, and switching the flies off with more and more impatient swingings of their tails. John grumbled indoors, who would not "set things straight" until his master was out of the way. But the doctor neglected them all. Not one of all the four, horses or men, would have changed places with him could they have seen him poring over the newspaper, which he had not cared to look at that morning, with the wrinkles drawn together

on his forehead. There was fury in his soul, that indignation beyond words, beyond self-command, with which a man perceives the rise and growth of a wrong which is beyond his setting right—a lie which he can only ineffectively contradict, struggle, or rage against, but cannot drive out of the minds of men. They had it in their own hands to say what they would. Dr. Maurice knew that during all the past winter his friend had been drawn into the work of the bank. He had even cautioned Robert, though in ignorance of the extent of his danger. He had said, "Don't forget that you are unaccustomed to the excitements of business. They will hurt you, though they don't touch the others. It is not your trade." These words came back to his mind with the bitterest sense of that absence of foresight which is common to man. "If I had but known!" he said. And then he remembered, with a bitter smile, his visit to Dr. Bradcliffe, his request to him to see poor Drummond "accidentally," his dread for his friend's brain. This it was which had affected poor Robert, worse than disease, worse than madness; for in madness or disease there would have been no human agency to blame.

The papers, as Burton had said, were full of this exciting story. Outside in the very streets there were great placards up with headings in immense capitals, "*Great Bankruptcy in the City.—Suicide of a Bank Director.*" The absconding of the manager, which had been the news the day before, was thrown into the background by this new fact, which was so much more tragical and important. "The latest information" was given by some in a Second Edition, so widespread was the commotion produced by the catastrophe; and even those of the public who did not care much for Rivers's, cared for the exciting tale, or for the fate of the unhappy professional man who had rashly involved himself in business, and ruined not only himself, but so many more. The story was so dramatically complete that public opinion decided upon it at once. It did not even want the grieved, indignant letter which Mr. Golden, injured man, wrote to the *Times*, begging that the report against him should be contradicted. This letter was printed in large type, and its tone was admirable. "I will not prejudge any man, more especially one whose premature end has thrown a cloud of horror over the unfortunate business transactions of the bank with which I have had the honour of being connected for fifteen years," Mr. Golden wrote, "but I cannot permit my temporary, innocent, and

much-regretted absence to be construed into an evidence that I had deserted my post. With the help of Providence, I will never desert it, so long as I can entertain the hope of saving from the wreck a shilling of the shareholders' money." It was a very good letter, very creditable to Mr. Golden; and everybody had read it, and accepted it as gospel, before Dr. Maurice got his hand upon it. In the *Daily Semaphore*, which the doctor did not see, there was already an article on the subject, very eloquent and slightly discursive, insisting strongly upon the wickedness and folly of men who without capital, or even knowledge of business, thus ventured to play with the very existence of thousands of people. "Could the unfortunate man who has hidden his shame in a watery grave look up this morning from that turbid bed and see the many homes which he has filled with desolation, who can doubt that the worst and deepest hell fabled by the great Italian poet would lose something of its intensity in comparison?—the ineffectual fires would pale; a deeper and a more terrible doom would be that of looking on at all the misery—all the ruined households and broken hearts which cry out to-day over all England for justice on their destroyer." Fortunately Dr. Maurice did not read this article; but he did read the *Times* and its editorial comments. "There can be little doubt," that journal said, "that the accidental absence of Mr. Golden, the manager, whose letter explaining all the circumstances will be found in another column, determined Drummond to his final movement. It left him time to secure the falsified books, and remove all evidence of his guilt. It is not for us to explain by what caprice of despair, after taking all this trouble, the unhappy man should have been driven to self-destruction. The workings of a mind in such an unnatural condition are too mysterious to be discussed here. Perhaps he felt that when all was done, death was the only complete exemption from those penalties which follow the evil-doer on this earth. We can only record the fact; we cannot explain the cause. The manager and the remaining directors, hastily summoned to meet the emergency, have been labouring ever since, we understand, with the help of a well-known accountant, to make up the accounts of the company, as well as that can be done in the absence of the books which there is every reason to suppose were abstracted by Drummond before he left the office. It has been suggested that the river should be dragged for them as well as for the body of the unhappy man, which up to this

time has not been recovered. But we doubt much whether, even should such a work be successful, the books would be legible after an immersion even of two or three days. We believe that no one, even the persons most concerned, are yet able to form an estimate of the number of persons to whom this lamentable occurrence will be ruin."

Dr. Maurice put down the paper with a gleam in his face of that awful and heartrending rage which indignation is apt to rise into when it feels itself most impotent. What could he do to stop such a slander? He could contradict it; he could say, "I know Robert Drummond; he was utterly incapable of this baseness." Alas! who was he that the world should take his word for it? He might bring a counter charge against Golden; he might accuse him of abstracting the books, and being the author of all the mischief; but what proof had he to substantiate his accusation? He had no evidence—not a hair's-breadth. He could not prove, though he believed, that this was all a scheme suggested to the plotters, if there were more than one, or to Golden himself, if he were alone in his villany, by the unlooked-for chance of Drummond's suicide. This was what he believed. All the more for the horrible *vraisemblance* of the story, could he see the steps by which it had been put together. Golden had absconded, taking with him everything that was damning in the way of books. He had lain hidden somewhere near at hand waiting an opportunity to get away. He had heard of poor Drummond's death, and an opportunity of a different kind, a devilish yet brilliantly successful way of escape, had suddenly appeared for him. All this burst upon Dr. Maurice as by a revelation while he sat with those papers before him gnawing his nails and clutching the leading journal as if it had been Golden's throat. He saw it all. It came out before him like a design in phosphorus, twinkling and glowing through the darkness. He was sure of it; but—what to do?

This man had a touch in him of the antique friendship—the bond for which men have encountered all odds and dared death, and been happy in their sacrifice. But even disinterestedness, even devotion do not give a man the mental power to meet such foes, or to frame a plan by which to bring them to confusion. He grew himself confused with the thought. He could not make out what to do first—how he should begin. He had forgotten how the hours went—what time of the day it was while he pondered these sub-

jects. The fire in his veins, instead of acting as a simple stimulant, acted upon him like intoxication. His brain reeled under the pressure. "Will you have lunch, sir, before you go out?" said John, with restrained wrath, but a pretence of stateliness. "Lunch!—how dare you come into my room, sir, before I ring!" cried his master, waking up and looking at him with what seemed to John murderous eyes. And then he sprang up, tore the papers into little pieces, crammed them into the fire-place, and, seizing his hat, rushed out to the carriage. The coachman was nodding softly on the box. The heat, and the stillness, and the monotony had triumphed even over the propriety of a man who knew all London, he was fond of saying, as well as he knew his own hands. The coachman almost dropped from his box when Maurice, throwing the door of the little carriage open, startled him suddenly from his slumber. The horses, which were half asleep too, woke also with much jarring of harness and prancing of hoof and head.

"To the *Times* office," was what the doctor said. He could not go and clutch that villain by the throat, though that might be the best way. It was another kind of lion which he was about to beard in his den.

CHAPTER XIII.

NONE of the persons chiefly concerned in this history, except himself, knew as yet whether Reginald Burton was good or bad. But one thing is certain, that there were good intentions in his mind when he startled Dr. Maurice with this extraordinary tale. He had a very busy morning, driving from place to place in his hansom, giving up so many hours of his day without much complaint. He had expected Maurice to know what the papers would have told him, had he been less overwhelmed with the event itself of which they gave so strange a version, and he had intended to have a friendly consultation with him about Mrs. Drummond's means of living, and what was to be done for her. Something must be done for her, there was no doubt about that. She could not be allowed to starve. She was his own cousin, once Helen Burton; and, no doubt, by this time she had found out her great mistake. It must not be supposed that this thought brought with it any lingering fondness of recollection, any touch of the old love with which he himself had once looked upon her. It would have been highly improper had it done anything of the kind. He had a Mrs. Burton of his own, who of course possessed

his entire affections, and he was not a man to indulge in any illegitimate emotion. But still he had been thinking much of Helen since this bewildering event occurred. It was an event which had taken him quite by surprise. He did not understand it. He felt that he himself could never be in such despair, could never take "a step so rash"—the only step a man could take which left no room for repentance. It had been providential, no doubt, for some things. But Helen had been in his mind since ~~ever~~ he had time to think. There was a little glitter in his eye, a little complacent curl about the corners of his mouth, as he thought of her, and her destitute condition, and her helplessness. What a mistake she had made! She had chosen a wretched painter, without a penny, instead of himself. And this was what it had come to. Now at least she must have found out what a fool she had been. But yet he intended to be good to her in his way. He vowed to himself, with perhaps some secret compunction in the depths of his heart, that if she would let him he would be very good to her. Nor was Helen the only person to whom he intended to be good. He went to the Haldanes as well, with kindest sympathy and offers of help. "Perhaps you may think I was to blame in recommending such an investment of your money?" he said to Stephen, with that blunt honesty which charms so many people. "But my first thought was of you when I heard of the crash. I wish I had bitten my tongue out sooner than recommended it. The first people who came into my head were my cousin Helen and you."

Dismay and trouble were in the Haldanes' little house. They had not recovered from the shock. They were like three ghosts—each endeavouring to hide the blackness from each other which had fallen upon their souls. Miss Jane and her mother, however, had begun to get a little relief in talking over the great misery which had fallen upon them. They had filled the room with newspapers, in which they devoured every scrap of news which bore on that one subject. They sat apart in a corner and read them to each other, while Stephen closed his poor sad eyes and withdrew into himself. It was the only retirement he had, his only way of escape from the monotonous details of their family life, and the constant presence of his nurses and attendants. This man had such attendants—unwearying, uncomplaining, always ready whatever he wanted, giving up their lives to his service—as few men have; and yet there

were moments when he would have given the world to be free of them,—now and then, for half an hour, to be able to be alone. He had been sitting thus in his oratory, his place of retirement, having shut his doors, and gone into his chamber by that single action of closing his eyes, when Mr. Burton came in. The women had been reading those papers to him till he had called to them to stop. They had made his heart sore, as our hearts are being made sore now by tales of wrong and misery which we cannot help, cannot stop, can do nothing but weep for, or listen to with hearts that burn and bleed. Stephen Haldane's heart was so—it was sore, quivering with the stroke it had sustained, feeling as if it would burst out of his breast. People say that much invoked and described organ is good only for tough physical uses, and knows no sentiment; but surely such people have never had a *sore heart*.

Poor Stephen's heart was sore: he could feel the great wound in it through which the life-blood stole. Yesterday he had been stupefied. To-day he had begun to wonder why, if a sacrifice was needed, it should not have been him? He who was good for nothing, a burden on the earth; and not Robert, the kindest, truest—God bless him! yes, God bless him down yonder at the bottom of the river, down with Dives in a deeper depth if that might be—anywhere, everywhere, even in hell or purgatory, God bless him! this was what his friend said, not afraid. And the women in the corner, in the meanwhile, read all the details, every one—about the dragging of the river, about the missing books, about Mr. Golden, who had been so wronged. Mrs. Haldane believed it every word, having a dread of human nature and a great confidence in the newspapers; but Miss Jane was tormented with an independent opinion, and hesitated and could not believe. It had almost distracted their attention from the fact which there could be no question about, which all knew for certain—their own ruin. Rivers's had stopped payment, whoever was in fault, and everything this family had—their capital, their income, everything was gone. It had stunned them all the first day, but now they were beginning to call together their forces and live again; and when Mr. Burton made the little sympathetic speech above recorded it went to their hearts.

"I am sure it is very kind, very kind of you to say so," said Mrs. Haldane. "We never thought of blaming—you."

"I don't go so far as that," said Miss Jane. "I always speak my mind. I blame every-

body, mother; one for one thing, one for another. There is nobody that has taken thought for Stephen, not one. Stephen ought to have been considered, and that he was not able to move about and see to things for himself like other men."

"It is very true, it is very true!" said Mr. Burton, sighing. He shook his head, and he made a little movement of his hand, as if deprecating blame. He held up his hat with the mourning band upon it, and looked as if he might have wept. "When you consider all that has happened," he said in a low tone of apology. "Some who have been in fault have paid for it dearly, at least——"

It was Stephen's voice which broke in upon this apology, in a tone as different as could be imagined—high-pitched, almost harsh. When he was the popular minister of Ormond Street Chapel it was one of the standing remarks made by his people to strangers, "Has not he a beautiful voice?" But at this moment all the tunefulness and softness had gone out of it. "Mr. Burton," he said, "what do you mean to do to vindicate Drummond? It seems to me that *that* comes first."

"To vindicate Drummond!" Mr. Burton looked up with a sudden start, and then he added hurriedly, with an impetuosity which secured the two women to his side, "Haldane, you are too good for this world. Don't let us speak of Drummond. I will forgive him—if I can."

"How much have you to forgive him?" said the preacher. Once more, how much? By this time Mr. Burton felt that he had a right to be angry with the question.

"How much?" he said; "really I don't feel it necessary to go into my own business affairs with everybody who has a curiosity to know. I am willing to allow that my losses are as nothing to yours. Pray don't let us go into this question, for I don't want to lose my temper. I came to offer any assistance that was in my power—to you."

"Oh, Mr. Burton, Stephen is infatuated about that miserable man," said the mother; "he cannot see harm in him; and even now, when he has taken his own life and proved himself to be——"

"Stephen has a right to stand up for his friend," said Miss Jane. "If I had time I would stand up for him too; but Stephen's comfort has to be thought of first. Mr. Burton, the best assistance you could give us would be to get me something to do. I can't be a governess, and needlework does not pay; neither does teaching, for that matter, even

if I could do it. I am a good housekeeper, though I say it. I can keep accounts with anybody. I am not a bad cook even. And I'm past forty, and never was pretty in my life, so that I don't see it matters whether I am a woman or a man. I don't care what I do or where I go, so long as I can earn some money. Can you help me to that? Don't groan, Stephen; do you think I mind it? and don't you smile, Mr. Burton. I am in earnest for my part."

Stephen had groaned in his helplessness. Mr. Burton smiled in his superiority, in his amused politeness of contempt for the plain woman past forty. "We can't let you say that," he answered jocosely, with a look at her which reminded Miss Jane that she was a woman after all, and filled her with suppressed fury. But what did such covert insult matter? It did not harm her; and the man who sneered at her homeliness might help her to work for her brother, which was the actual matter in hand.

"It is very difficult to know of such situations for ladies," said Mr. Burton, "if anything should turn up, of course—but I fear it would not do to depend upon that."

"Stephen has his pension from the chapel," said Miss Jane. She was not delicate about these items, but stated her case loudly and plainly, without even considering what Stephen's feelings might be. "It was to last for five years, and nearly three of them are gone; and he has fifty pounds a year for the Magazine—that is not much, Mr. Burton, for all the trouble; they might increase that. And mother and I are trying to let the house furnished, which would always be something. We could remove into lodgings, and if nothing more is to be got, of course we must do upon what we have."

Here Mr. Burton cast a look upon the invalid who was surrounded by so many contrivances of comfort. It was a compassionate glance, but it stung poor Stephen. "Don't think of me," he said hoarsely; "my wants, though I look such a burden upon everybody, are not many after all. Don't think of me."

"We could do with what we have," Miss Jane went on—she was so practical, she rode over her brother's susceptibilities and ignored them, which perhaps was the best thing that could have been done—"if you could help us with a tenant for our house, Mr. Burton, or get the Magazine committee to give him a little more than fifty pounds. The work it is! what with writing—and I am sure he writes half of it himself—and reading those odious manuscripts which ruin

his eyes, and correcting proofs, and all that. It is a shame that he has only fifty pounds——"

"But he need not take so much trouble unless he likes, Jane," said Mrs. Haldane, shaking her head. "I liked it as it was."

"Never mind, mother; Stephen knows best, and it is him that we have got to consider. Now, Mr. Burton, here is what you can do for us—I should not have asked anything, but since you have offered, I suppose you mean it—something for me to do, or some one to take the house, or a little more money for the Magazine. Then we could do. I don't like anything that is vague. I suppose you prefer that I should tell you plain?"

"To be sure," said Mr. Burton; and he smiled, looking at her with that mixture of contemptuous amusement and dislike with which a plain middle-aged woman so often inspires a vulgar-minded man. That the women who want to work are always old hags, was one of the articles of his creed; and here was an illustration. Miss Jane troubled herself very little about his amusement or his contempt. She did not much believe in his good-will. But if he did mean it, why, it was best to take advantage of his offer. This was her practical view of the subject. Mr. Burton turned from her to Stephen, who had taken no part in the talk. Necessity had taught to the sick man its stern philosophy. He had to listen to such discussions twenty times in a day, and he had steeled his heart to hear them, and make no sign.

"What would you say to life in the country?" he said. "The little help I came to offer in these sad circumstances is not in any of the ways Miss Jane suggests. I don't know anybody that wants to take just this kind of house:" and he glanced round at it with a smile. He to know a possible tenant for such a nutshell! "And I don't know any situation that would suit your sister, though I am sure she would be invaluable. My father-in-law is the man to speak about the Magazine business. Possibly he could manage that. But what I would offer you if you like, would be a lodging in the country. I have a house down at Dura, which is of no use to me. There is good air and a garden, and all that. You are as welcome as possible if you like to come."

"A house in the country," said Mrs. Haldane. "Oh my boy! Oh, Mr. Burton! he might get well there."

Poor soul! it was her delusion that Stephen was to get well. She took up this new hop

with eyes which, old as they were, flashed out with brightness and consolation. "What will all our losses matter if Stephen gets well?" she went on beginning to cry. And Miss Jane rose up hastily, and went away with a tremulous harshness, shutting her lips up tight, to the other side of the room, to get her work, which she had been neglecting. Miss Jane was like a man in this, that she could not bear tears. She set her face against them, holding herself in, lest she too might have been tempted to join. Of all the subjects of discussion in this world, Stephen's recovery was the only one she could not bear; for she loved her brother like a poet, like a starved and frozen woman who has had but one love in her life.

The old mother was more manageable to Mr. Burton's mind than Miss Jane. Her tears and gratitude restored him to what he felt was his proper place,—that of a benefactor and guardian angel. He sat for half an hour longer, and told Mrs. Haldane all about the favour he was willing to confer. "It is close to the gates of my own house, but you must not think that will be an annoyance to us," he said. "On the contrary, I don't mean to tell my father-in-law till he sees you there. It will be a pleasant surprise for him. He has always taken so much interest in Haldane. Don't say anything, I beg. I am very glad you should have it, and I hope it will make you feel this dreadful calamity less. Ah yes; it is wretched for us; but what must it be for my poor cousin? I am going to see her now."

"I don't know her," said Mrs. Haldane. "She has called at the door to ask for Stephen, very regular. That I suppose was because of the friendship between—but I have only seen her once or twice on a formal call. If all is true that I hear, she will take it hard, being a proud woman. Oh! pride's sinful at the best of times; but in a time like this——"

"Mother!"

"Yes, Stephen, I know; and I am sure I would not for the world say a word against friends of yours; but——"

"I must go now," said Mr. Burton, rising. "Good-bye, Haldane. I will write to you about the house, and when you can come in. On second thoughts, I will not prevent you from mentioning it to Mr. Baldwin, if you please. He is sure to ask what you are going to do, and he will be glad to know."

He went out from Victoria Villas pleased with himself. He had been very good to these people, who really were nothing to

him. He was not even a Dissenter, but a staunch Churchman, and had no sympathy for the sick minister. What was his motive, then? But it was his wife who made it her business to investigate his motives, and we may wait for the result of her examination. All this was easy enough. The kindness he had offered was one which would cost him little, and he had not suffered in this interview as he had done in that which preceded it. But now he had occasion for all his strength; now came the tug of war, the real strain. He was going to see Helen. She had been but three days a widow, and no doubt would be in the depth of that darkness which is the recognised accompaniment of grief. Would she see him? Could she have seen the papers, or heard any echo of their news? On this point he was nervous. Before he went to St. Mary's Road, though it was close at hand, he went to the nearest hotel, and had a glass of wine and a biscuit. For such a visit he required all his strength.

But these precautions were unnecessary. The shutters were all closed in St. Mary's Road. The lilacs were waving their plummy fragrant branches over a door which no one entered. Mrs. Drummond was at home, but saw no one. Even when the maid carried his message to her, the answer was that she could see no one, that she was quite well, and required nothing. "Not even the clergy man, sir," said the maid. "He's been, but she would not see him. She is as white as my apron, and her poor hands you could see the light through 'em. We all think as she'll die too."

"Does she read the papers?" said Mr. Burton anxiously. He was relieved when the woman said "No." He gave her half-a-crown, and bade her admit none to the house till he came again. Rebecca promised and curtsied, and went back to the kitchen to finish reading that article in the *Daily Semaphore*. The fact that it was "master" who was there called "this unfortunate man" and "this unhappy wretch," gave the strongest zest to it. "La! to think he could have had all that on his mind," they said to each other. George was the only one who considered it might be "a made-up story," and he was believed to say so more from "contrarieness," and a desire to set up for superior wisdom, than because he had any real doubt on the subject. "A person may say a thing, but I never heard of one yet as would go for to put it in print, if it wasn't true," was Rebecca's comment. "I'm sorry for poor master, all the same," said Jane the house-

maid, who was tender-hearted, and who had put on an old black gown of her own accord. The servants were not to get mourning, which was something unheard of; and they had all received notice, and, as soon as Mrs. Drummond was able to move, were to go away.

For that matter, Helen was able to move then—able to go to the end of the earth, as she felt with a certain horror of herself. It is so natural to suppose that physical weakness should come in the train of grief; but often it does not, and the elastic delicate strength of Helen's frame resisted all the influences of her sorrow. She scarcely eat at all; she slept little; the world had grown to her one great sea of darkness and pain and desolation: and yet she could not lie down and die as she had thought she would, but felt such a current of feverish energy in all her veins as she had never felt before. She could have done anything—laboured, travelled, worked with her hands, fought even, not like a man, but like twenty men. She was conscious of this, and it grieved and horrified her. She felt as a woman brought up in conventional proprieties would naturally feel, that her health ought to have been affected, that her strength should have failed her. But it had not done so. Her grief inflamed her rather, and set her heart on fire. Even now, in these early days, when custom

decreed that she ought to be incapable of exertion, "keeping her bed," she felt herself in possession of a very flood of energy and excited strength. She was miserable, but she was not weak. She shut herself up in the darkened house all day, but half the night would walk about in her garden, in her despair, trying to tame down the wild life which had come with calamity. Poor little Norah crept about everywhere after her, and lay watching with great wide-open eyes, through the silvery half-darkness of the summer night, till she should come to bed. But Norah was not old enough to understand her mother, and was herself half frightened by this extraordinary change in her, which affected the child's imagination more than the simple disappearance of her father did, though she wept and longed for him with a dreary sense that unless he came back, life never could be as of old, and that he would never, never come back. But all the day long Mrs. Drummond sat in her darkened room, and "was not able to see any one." She endured the vigil, and would have done so, if she had died of it. That was what was called "proper respect:" it was the conventional necessity of the moment. Mr. Burton called again and again, but it was more than a fortnight before he was admitted. And in the meantime he too had certain preparations to go through.



PART VI.

CHAPTER XIV.



R. BURTON was a man who was accustomed in his own house to have, in a great degree, his own way; but this was not because his wife was disinclined to hold, or incapable of forming an opinion of her own. On the contrary, it was because he was rather afraid of her

than otherwise, and thought twice before he promulgated any sentiments or started any plan which was likely to be in opposition to hers. But he had neither consulted her, nor, indeed, thought much of what she would say in the sudden proposal he had made to the Haldanes. He was not a hasty man; but Dr. Maurice's indignation had made an impression upon him, and he had felt all at once that in going to the Haldanes and to Helen, he must not, if he would preserve his own character, go with merely empty sympathy, but must show practically his pity for them. It was perhaps the only time in his life that he had acted upon a hasty idea without taking time to consider; and a chill doubt, as to what Clara would say, was in his mind as he turned his face homewards. Dura was about twenty miles from town, in the heart of one of the leafiest of English counties; the station was a mile and a half from the great house, half of which distance, however, was avenue; and Mr. Burton's phaeton, with the two greys—horses which matched to a hair, and were not equalled in the stables of any potentate in the county—was waiting for him when the train arrived. He liked to drive home in this glorious way, rousing the village folks and acting as a timepiece for them, just as he liked the great dinner-bell, which the old Harcourts sounded only on great occasions, to be rung every day, letting

the whole neighbourhood know that their local lord, their superior, the master of the great house, was going to dinner. He liked the thought that his return was an event in the place almost justifying the erection of a standard, as it was erected in a royal castle not very far off, when the sovereign went and came. Our rich man had not gone so far as yet, but he would have liked it, and felt it natural. The village of Dura was like a collection of beads threaded on the long white thread of road which ran from the station to the house—and occupied the greater part of the space, with single houses straggling at either end, and a cluster in the middle. The straggling houses at the end next the station were white villas, built for people whose business was in town, and who came home to dinner by the same train which brought Mr. Burton, though their arrival was less imposing; but where the clump of dwelling-places thickened, the houses toned down into old-fashioned deeply-lichened brick, with here and there a thatched roof to deepen, or a whitewashed gable to relieve, the composition. At the end nearest the great house the village made a respectful pause, and turned off along a slanting path, which showed the tower of the church behind over the trees. The rectory, however, a pretty house buried in shrubberies, fronted the high road with modest confidence; and opposite it was another dwelling-place, in front of which Mr. Burton drew up his horses for a moment, inspecting it with a careful and anxious eye. His heart beat a little quicker as he looked. His own gate was in sight, and these were the very grounds of Dura House, into which the large walled garden of this one intruded like a square wedge. In front there were no shrubberies, no garden, nothing to divide it from the road. A double row of pollard limes—one on the edge of the foot-path, one close to the house—indicated and shaded, but did not separate it from the common way. The second row of limes was level with the fence of the Dura grounds, and one row of white flagstones lay between them and the two white steps, the green door, and shining brass knocker of the Gatehouse. It was a house which had been built in the reign of the first George, of red brick, with a great many windows, three-storied, and crowned by a pediment, with that curious mixture of the useful and (supposed) ornamental, which

by this time has come to look almost picturesque by reason of age. It had been built for the mother of one of the old Harcourts, a good woman who had been born the Rector's daughter of the place, and loved it and its vicinity, and the sight of its comings and goings. This was the origin of the Gatehouse; but since the days of Mrs. Dunstable Harcourt it had rarely been inhabited by any of the family, and had been a trouble more than an advantage to them. It was too near the hall to be inhabited by strangers, and people do not always like to establish their own poor relations and dependents at their very gates. As the Harcourts dwindled and money became important to them, they let it at a small rate to a maiden household, two or three old ladies of limited means, and blood as blue as their own. And when Dura ceased, except on county maps, to be Harcourt-Dura, and passed into the hands of the rich merchant, he, too, found the Gatehouse a nuisance. There had been talk of pulling it down, but that would have been waste; and there had been attempts made to let it to "a suitable tenant," but no suitable tenant had been found. Genteel old ladies of blue blood had not found the vicinity of the Burtons a comfort to them as they did that of the Harcourts. And there it stood empty, echoing, void, a place where the homeless might be sheltered. Did Mr. Burton's heart glow with benevolent warmth as he paused, drawing up his greys, and looked at it, with all its windows twinkling in the sun? To one of these windows a woman came forward at the sound of his pause, and, putting her face close to the small pane, looked out at him wondering. He gave her a nod, and sighed; and then flourished his whip, and the greys flew on. In another moment they had turned into the avenue and went dashing up the gentle ascent. It was a pretty avenue, though the trees were not so old as most of the Dura trees. The sunset gleamed through it, slanting down under the lowest branches, scattering the brown mossy undergrowth with lumps of gold. A little pleasant tricksy wind shook the branches and dashed little mimic showers of rain in the master's face: for it had been raining in the afternoon, and the air was fresh and full of a hundred nameless odours; but Mr. Burton gave forth another big sigh before he reached the house. He was a little afraid of what his wife would say, and he was afraid of what he had done.

He did not say anything about it, however, till dinner was over. The most propitious moment seemed that gentle hour of dessert,

when the inner man is strengthened and comforted, and there is time to dally over the poetic part of the meal—not that either of the Burtons were poetical. They were alone, not even the children being with them, for Mrs. Burton disapproved of children coming to dessert; but all the same, she was beautifully dressed; he liked it, and so did she. She made very little difference in this particular between her most imposing dinner parties and those evenings which she spent *à la* with her husband. When her aunts, who had old-fashioned ideas about extravagance, remonstrated with her, she defended herself, saying she could afford it, and he liked to see her well dressed. Mr. Burton hated to have any scrap of capital unemployed; and the only interest you could get from your jewels was the pleasure of wearing them, and seeing them worn, he said. So Mrs. Burton dined with her husband in a costume which a French lady of fashion would have considered appropriate to a ball or royal reception, with naked shoulders and arms, and lace and ornaments. Madame la Duchesse might have thought it much too fine, but Mrs. Burton did not. She was a pale little woman, small and thin, but not without beauty. Her hair was not very abundant, but it was exquisitely smooth and neat. Her uncovered shoulders were white, and her arms round and well-formed; and she had clear blue eyes, so much brighter than anybody expected, that they took the world by surprise: they were cold in their expression, but they were full of intelligence, and a hundred times more vivid and striking than anything else about her, so that everybody observed and admired Mrs. Burton's eyes.

"What has been going on to-day? What have you been doing?" she asked, when the servants went away. The question sounded affectionate, and showed at least that there was confidence between the husband and wife.

"Very much as usual," Mr. Burton said, with colloquial ease; and then he stopped and cleared his throat. "But for my own part I have done something rather foolish," he said, with an almost imperceptible tremor in his voice.

"Indeed?" She gave a quick glance up at him; but she was not excited, and went on calmly eating her strawberries. He was not the kind of man of whose foolish actions a wife is afraid.

"I have been to see the Haldanes to-day," he said, once more clearing his throat; "and I have been to Helen Drummond's, but did

not see her. The one, of course, I did out of regard for your father; the other—I was so distressed by the sight of that poor fellow in his helplessness, that I acted on impulse, Clara. I know it's a foolish thing to do. I said to myself, here are two families cast out of house and home, and there is the Gatehouse——”

“The Gatehouse!”

“Yes, I was afraid you would be startled; but reflect a moment: it is of no use to us. We have got nobody to occupy it. You know, indeed, how alarmed you were when your aunt Louisa took a fancy to it; and I have tried for a tenant in vain. Then, on the other hand, one cannot but be sorry for these poor people. Helen is my cousin; she has no nearer friend than I am. And your father is so much interested in the Haldanes——”

“I don't quite understand,” said Mrs. Burton, with undisturbed composure; “my father's interest in the Haldanes has nothing to do with the Gatehouse. Are they to live there?”

“That was what I thought,” said her husband, “but not, of course, if you have any serious dislike to it—not if you decidedly object——”

“Why should I decidedly object?” she said. “I should if you were bringing them to live with me; but otherwise—— It is not at all suitable—they will not be happy there. It will be a great nuisance to us. As it is, strangers rather admire it—it looks old-fashioned and pleasant; but if they made a squalid place of it, dirty windows, and cooking all over the house——”

“So far as *my* cousin is concerned; you could have nothing of that kind to fear,” said Mr. Burton, ceasing to be apologetic. He put a slight emphasis on the word *my*; perhaps upon this point he would not have been sorry to provoke his wife, but Clara Burton would not gratify her husband by any show of jealousy. She was not jealous, she was thinking solely of appearances, and of the possible decadence of the Gatehouse.

“Besides, Susan must stay,” he continued, after a pause; “she must remain in charge; the house must be kept as it ought to be. If that is your only objection, Clara——”

“I have made no objection at all,” said Mrs. Burton; and then she broke into a dry little laugh. “What a curious establishment it will be—an old broken-down nurserymaid, a Dissenting minister, and your cousin! Mr. Burton, will she like it? I cannot say that I should feel proud if it were offered to me.”

His face flushed a little. He was not anxious himself to spare Helen's feelings. If he had found an opportunity, it would have been agreeable to him to remind her that she had made a mistake; but she was his own relation, and instinct prompted him to protect her from his wife.

“Helen is too poor to allow herself to think whether she likes it or not,” he said.

His wife gave a sharp glance at him across the table. What did he mean? Did he intend to be kind, or to insult the desolate woman? Clara asked herself the question as a philosophical question, not because she cared.

“And is your cousin willing to accept it from you, after—that story?” she said.

“What story? You mean about her husband. It is not my story. I have nothing to do with it; and even if I had, surely it is the man who does wrong, not the man who tells it, that should have the blame; besides, she does not know.”

“Ah, that is the safest,” said Clara. “I think it is a very strange story, Mr. Burton. It may be true, but it is not like the truth.”

“I have nothing to do with it,” he exclaimed. He spoke hotly, with a swelling of the veins on his temples. “There are points of view in which his death was very providential,” he said.

And once more Clara gave him a sharp glance.

“It was the angel who watches over Mr. Golden that provided the boat, no doubt,” she answered, with a contraction of her lips; then fell back into the former topic with perfect calm. “I should insist upon the house being kept clean and nice,” she said, as she rose to go away.

“Surely—surely; and you may tell your father when you write, that poor Haldane is so far provided for.” He got up to open the door for her, and, detaining her for a moment, stooped down and kissed her forehead. “I am so much obliged to you, Clara, for consenting so kindly,” he said.

A faint little cold smile came upon her face. She had been his wife for a dozen years; but in her heart she was contemptuous of the kiss which he gave her, as if she had been a child, as a reward for her acquiescence. It is to be supposed that she loved him after her fashion. She had married him of her free will, and had never quarrelled with him once in all their married life. But yet had he known how his kiss was received, the sting would have penetrated even through the tough covering which protected Reginald

Burton's *amour propre*, if not his heart. Mrs. Burton went away into the great drawing-room, where her children, dressed like little princes in a comedy, were waiting for her. The Harcourts, in the old days, had made a much smaller room their family centre; but the Burtons always used the great drawing-room, and lived, as it were, in state from one year's end to another. Here Clara Burton dwelt—a little anonymous spirit, known to none even of her nearest friends. They were all puzzled by her "ways," and by the blank many-sided surface like a prism which she presented to them, refusing to be influenced by any. She did not know any more about herself than the others did. Outside she was all glitter and splendour; nobody dressed so well, nobody had such jewels, or such carriages, or such horses in all the county. She used every day, and in her homeliest moments, things which even princes reserve for their best. Mrs. Burton made it a boast that she had no best things; she was the same always, herself—and not her guests or anything apart from herself—being the centre of life in her house and in all her arrangements. The dinner which the husband and wife had just eaten had been as varied and as dainty, as if twenty people had sat down to it. It was her principle throughout her life. And yet within herself the woman cared for none of these things. Another woman's dress or jewels was nothing to her. She was totally indifferent to the external advantages which everybody else believed her to be absorbed in. Clara was very worldly, her aunts said, holding up their hands aghast at her extravagance and costly habits; but the fact was, that Clara made all her splendours common, not out of love for them, but contempt for them: a thing which nobody suspected. It is only a cynical soul that could feel thus, and Mrs. Burton's cynicism went very deep. She thought meanly of human nature, and did not believe much in goodness; but she seldom disapproved, and never condemned. She would smile and cast about in her mind (unawares) for the motive of any doubtful action, and generally ended by finding out that it was "very natural," a sentence which procured her credit for large toleration and a most amiable disposition, but which sprang really from the cynical character of her mind. It did not seem to her worth while to censure or to sermonise. She did not believe in reformation; and incredulity was in her the twin-brother of despair; but not a tragical despair. She took it all very calmly, not feeling that it was worth while to be

disturbed by it; and went on unconsciously tracking out the mean motives, the poor pretensions, the veiled selfishness of all around her. And she was not aware that she herself was any better, nor did she claim superiority—nay, she would even track her own impulses back to their root, and smile at them, though with a certain bitterness. But all this was so properly cloaked over that nobody suspected it. People gave her credit for wisdom because she generally believed the worst, and was so very often right; and they thought her tolerant because she would take pains to show how it was nature that was in fault, and not the culprit. No one suspected the terrible little cynic, pitiless and hopeless that she was in her heart.

And yet this woman was the mother of children, and had taught them their prayers, and was capable at that or any other moment of giving herself to be torn in pieces for them, as a matter of course, a thing which would not admit a possibility of doubt. She had thought of that in her many thinkings, had attempted to analyse her own love, and to fathom how much it was capable of. "As much as a tiger or a bear would do for her cubs," she had said to herself, with her usual smile. The strangest woman to sit veiled by Reginald Burton's fireside, and take the head of his table, and go to church with him in the richest, daintiest garments which money and skill could get for her! She was herself to some degree behind the scenes of her own nature; but even she could not always discriminate, down among the foundations of her being, which was false and which was true.

She went into the drawing-room, where her little Clara and Ned were waiting. Ned was thirteen, a year older than Norah Drummond. Mr. Burton had determined that he would not be behind the cousin who refused him, nor allow her to suppose that he was pining for her love, so that his marriage had taken place earlier than Helen's. Ned was a big boy, very active, and not given to book-learning; but Clara, who was a year younger, was a meditative creature like her mother. The boy was standing outside the open window, throwing stones at the birds in the distant trees. Little Clara stood within watching him, and making her comments on the sport.

"Suppose you were to kill a poor little bird. Suppose one of the young ones—one of the baby ones—were to try and fly a little bit, and you were to hit it. Suppose the poor papa when he comes home——"

"Oh, that's enough of your supposes," said the big boy. "Suppose I were to eat you? But I don't want to. I don't think you would be nice."

"Ned!" said a voice from behind Clara, which thrilled him through and through, and made the stones fall from his hands as if they had been suddenly paralysed, and were unable to grasp anything. "I know it is natural to boys to be cruel, but I had rather not have it under my own eyes."

"Cruel!" cried Ned, with some discontent. "A parcel of wretched sparrows and things that can't sing a note. They have no business in our trees. They ought to know what they would get."

"Are boys always cruel, mamma?" said little Clara, laying hold upon her mother's dress. She was like a little princess herself, all lace and embroidery and blue ribbons and beautifulness. Mrs. Burton made no answer. She did not even wait to see that her boy took no more shots at the birds. She drew a chair close to the window, and sat down; and as she took her seat she gave vent to a little fretful sigh. She was thinking of Helen, and was annoyed that she had actually no means of judging what were the motives that would move her should she come to Dura. It was difficult for her to understand simple ignorance and unsuspectingness, or to give them their proper place among the springs of human action. Her worst fault philosophically was that of ignoring these commonest influences of all.

"Mamma, you are thinking of something," said little Clara. "Why do you sigh, and why do you shake your head?"

"I have been trying to put together a puzzle," said her mother, "as you do sometimes; and I can't make it out."

"Ah, a puzzle," said Ned, coming in; "they are not at all fun, mamma. That beastly dissected map Aunt Louisa gave me—by Jove! I should like to take the little pieces and shy them at the birds."

"But, mamma," said Clara, "are you sure it is only that? I never saw you playing with toys."

"I wonder if I ever did?" said Mrs. Burton, with a little gleam of surprise. "Do you remember going to London once, Clara, and seeing your cousin, Norah Drummond? Should you like to have her here?"

"She was littler than me," said Clara, promptly, "though she was older. Papa told me. They lived in a funny little poky house. They had no carriages nor anything. She had never even tried to ride; fancy, mamma!

When I told her I had a pony all to myself, she only stared. How different she would think it if she came here!"

Her mother looked at the child with a curious light in her cold blue eyes. She gave a little harsh laugh.

"If it were not that it is natural, and you cannot help it," she said, "I should like to whip you, my dear!"

CHAPTER XV.

NEXT morning the family at Dura paid a visit to the Gatehouse, to see all its capabilities, and arrange the changes which might be necessary. It was a bright morning after the rain, and they walked together down the dewy avenue, where the sunshine played through the network of leaves, and the refreshed earth sent up sweet odours. All was pleasant to sight and sound, and made a lightsome beginning to the working day. Mr. Burton was pleased with himself and everything surrounding him. His children (he was very proud of his children) strolled along with their father and mother, and there was in Ned a precocious imitation of his own walk and way of holding himself which at once amused and flattered the genial papa. He was pleased by his boy's appreciation of his own charms of manner and appearance; and little Clara was like him, outwardly, at least, being of a larger mould than her mother. His influence was physically predominant in the family, and as for profounder influences these were not much visible as yet. Mrs. Burton had a *toilette fraîche* of the costliest simplicity. Two or three dogs attended them on their walk—a handsome pointer and a wonderful hairy Skye, and the tiniest of little Maltese terriers, with a blue ribbon round its neck such as Clara had, of whose colours her dog was a repetition. When she made a rush now and then along the road, herself like a great white and blue butterfly, the dogs ran too, throwing up their noses in the air, till Ned, marching along in his knickerbockers, with his chest set out, and his head held up like his father's, whistled the bigger ones to his masculine side. It was quite a pretty picture this family procession; they were so well off, so perfectly supplied with everything that was pleasant and suitable, so happily above the world and its necessities. There was a look of wealth about them that might almost have seemed insolent to a poor man. The spectator felt sure that if fricassee bank-notes had been good to eat, they must have had a little dish of that for breakfast. And the crown of all

was that they were going to do a good action—to give shelter and help to the homeless. Many simple persons would have wept over the spectacle, had they known it, out of pure delight in so much goodness—if Mrs. Burton, looking on with those clear cold blue eyes of hers, had not thrown upon the matter something of a clearer light.

The inspection was satisfactory enough, revealing space sufficient to have accommodated twice as many people. And Mr. Burton found it amusing too; for Susan, who was in charge, was very suspicious of their motives, and anxious to secure that she should not be put upon in any arrangement that might be made. There was a large, quaint, old drawing-room, with five glimmering windows—three fronting to the road and two to the garden—not French sashes, cut down to the ground, but old-fashioned English windows with a sill to them, and a solid piece of wall underneath. The chimney had a high wooden mantelpiece with a little square of mirror let in, too high up for any purpose but that of giving a glimmer of reflection. The carpet, which was very much worn, was partially covered by a tightly strained white cloth, as if the room had been prepared for dancing. The furniture was very thin in the legs and angular in its proportions; some of the chairs were ebony, with bands of faded gilding and covers of minute old embroidery, into which whole lives had been worked. The curtains were of old-fashioned, big-patterned chintz—like that we call Cretonne nowadays—with brown linings. Everything was very old and worn, but clean and carefully mended. The looker-on felt it possible that the entrance of a stranger might so break the spell that all might crumble into dust at a touch. But yet there was a quaint, old-fashioned elegance—not old enough to be antique, but yet getting venerable—about the silent old house. Mr. Burton was of opinion that it would be better with new red curtains and some plain, solid mahogany; but, if the things would do, considered that it was unnecessary to incur further expense. When all the necessary arrangements had been settled upon, the family party went on to the railway station. This was a very frequent custom with them. Mr. Burton liked to come home in state—to notify his arrival by means of the high-stepping greys and the commotion they made, to his subjects; but he was quite willing to leave in the morning with graceful humility and that exhibition of family affection which brings even the highest potentates to a level with common men. When he

arrived with his wife and his children and his dogs at the station, it was touching to see the devotion with which the station-master and the porters and everybody about received the great man. The train seemed to have been made on purpose for him—to have come on purpose all the way out of the Midland Counties; the railway people ran all along its length as soon as it arrived to find a vacant carriage for their demigod. "Here you are, sir!" cried a smiling porter. "Here you are, sir!" echoed the station-master, rushing forward to open the door. The other porter, who was compelled by duty to stand at the little gate of exit and take the tickets, looked gloomily upon the active service of his brethren, but identified himself with their devotion by words at least, since nothing else was left him. "What d'ye mean by being late?" he cried to the guard. "A train didn't ought to be late as takes gentlemen to town for business. You're as slow, you are, as if you was the ladies' express."

Mr. Burton laughed as he passed, and gladness stole into the porter's soul. Oh, magical power of wealth! when it laughs, the world grows glad. To go into the grimy world of business, and be rubbed against in the streets by men who did him no homage, must be hard upon such a man, after the royal calm of the morning and all its pleasant circumstances. It was after just such another morning that he went again to St. Mary's Road, and was admitted to see his cousin. She had shut herself up for a fortnight obstinately. She would have done so for a year, in defiance of herself and of nature, had it been possible, that all the world might know that Robert had "the respect" due to him. She would not have deprived him of one day, one fold of crape, one imbecility of grief, of her own will. She would have been ill, if she could, to do him honour. All this was quite independent of that misery of which the world could know nothing, which was deep as the sea in her own heart. That must last let her do what she would. But she would fain have given to her husband the outside too. The fortnight, however, was all that poor Helen could give. Already stern need was coming in, and the creditors, to whom everything she had belonged. When Mr. Burton was admitted, the man had begun to make an inventory of the furniture. The pretty drawing-room was already dismantled, the plants all removed from the conservatory; the canvases were stacked against the wall in poor Robert's studio, and a picture-dealer was there valuing them. They were

of considerable value now—more than they would have been had it still been possible that they should be finished. People who were making collections of modern pictures would buy them readily as the only “Drummonds” now to be had. Mr. Burton went and looked at the pictures, and pointed out one that he would like to buy. His feelings were not very delicate, but yet it struck a certain chill upon him to go into that room. Poor Drummond himself was lying at the bottom of the river—he could not reproach any one, even allowing that it was not all his own fault. And yet—the studio was unpleasant to Mr. Burton. It affected his nerves; and in anticipation of his interview with Helen he wanted all his strength.

But Helen received him very gently, more so than he could have hoped. She had not seen the papers. The world and its interests had gone away from her. She had read nothing but the good books which she felt it was right to read during her seclusion. She was unaware of all that had happened, unsuspecting, did not even care. It had never occurred to her to think of dishonour as possible. All calamity was for her concentrated in the one which had happened, which had left her nothing more to fear. She was seated in a very small room opening on the garden, which had once been appropriated to Norah and her playthings. She was very pale, with the white rim of her cap close round her face, and her hair concealed. Norah was there too, seated close to her mother, giving her what support she could with instinctive faithfulness. Mr. Burton was more overcome by the sight of them than he could have thought it possible to be. They were worse even than the studio. He faltered, he cleared his throat, he took Helen's hand and held it—then let it drop in a confused way. He was overcome, she thought, with natural emotion, with grief and pity. And it made her heart soft even to a man she loved so little. “Thanks,” she murmured, as she sank down upon her chair. That tremor in his voice covered a multitude of sins.

“I have been here before,” he said.

“Yes, so I heard; it was very kind. Don't speak of *that*, please. I am not able to bear it, though it is kind, very kind of you.”

“Everybody is sorry for you, Helen,” he said, “but I don't want to recall your grief to your mind——”

“Recall!” she said, with a kind of miserable smile. “That was not what I meant;

but—Reginald—my heart is too sore to bear talking. I—cannot speak, and—I would rather not cry—not just now.”

She had not called him Reginald before since they were boy and girl together; and that, and the piteous look she gave him, and her tremulous protest that she would rather not cry, gave the man such a twinge through his very soul as he had never felt before. He would have changed places at the moment with one of his own porters to get out of it—to escape from a position which he alone was aware of. Norah was crying without restraint. It was such a scene as a man in the very height of prosperity and comfort would hesitate to plunge into, even if there had not risen before him those ghosts in the newspapers which one day or other, if not now, Helen must find out.

“What I wanted to speak of was your own plans,” he said hastily, “what you think of doing, and—if you will not think me impertinent—what you have to depend upon? I am your nearest relation, Helen, and it is right I should know.”

“If everything has to be given up, I suppose I shall have nothing,” she said faintly. “There was my hundred a year settled upon me. The papers came the other day. Who must I give them to? I have nothing, I suppose.”

“If your hundred a year was settled on you, of course you have that, heaven be praised,” said Mr. Burton, “nobody can touch that. And, Helen, if you like to come back to the old neighbourhood, I have part of a house I could offer you. It is of no use to me. I can't let it; so you might be quite easy in your mind about that. And it is furnished after a sort; and it would be rent free.”

The tears which she had been restraining rushed to her eyes. “How kind you are!” she said. “Oh, I can't say anything; but you are very, very kind.”

“Never mind about that. You used to speak as if you did not like the old neighbourhood——”

“Ah!” she said, “that was when I cared. All neighbourhoods are the same to me now.”

“But you will get to care after a while,” he said. “You will not always be as you are now.”

She shook her head with that faint little gleam of the painfulest smile. To such a suggestion she could make no answer. She did not believe her grief would ever lighten. She did not wish to feel differently. She had

not even that terrible experience which teaches some that the broken heart must heal one way or other—mend of its wound, or at least have its wound skinned over; for she had never been quite stricken down to the ground before.

"Anyhow, you will think of it," Mr. Burton said in a soothing tone. "Norah, you would like to come and live in the country, where there was a nice large garden and plenty of room to run about. You must persuade your mother to come. I won't stay now to worry you, Helen, and besides, my time is precious; but you will let me do this much for you, I hope."

She stood up in her black gown, which was so dismal and heavy, without any reflection of light in its dull blackness, and held out to him a hand which was doubly white by the contrast, and thin with fasting and watching. "You are very kind," she said again. "If I ever was unjust to you, forgive me. I must have a home—for Norah; and I have nowhere—nowhere to go!"

"Then that is settled," he said with eagerness. It was an infinite relief to him. Never in his life had he been so anxious to serve another. Was it because he had loved her once? because he was fond of her still? because she was his relation? His wife at that very moment was pondering on the matter, touching it as it were with a little sharp spear, which was not celestial like Ithuriel's. Being his wife, it would have been natural enough if some little impulse of jealousy had come across her, and moved her towards the theory that her husband did this out of love for his cousin. But Mrs. Burton had not blood enough in her veins, and she had too clear an intelligence in her head to be jealous. She came to such a very different conclusion, that I hesitate to repeat it; and she, too, half scared by the long journey she had taken, and her very imperfect knowledge of the way by which she had travelled, did not venture to put it into words. But the whisper at the bottom of her heart was, "Remorse! Remorse!" Mrs. Burton herself did not know for what, nor how far her husband was guilty towards his cousin.

But it was a relief to all parties when this interview was over. Mr. Burton went away drawing a long breath. And Helen applied herself courageously to the work which was before her. She did not make any hardship to herself about those men who were taking the inventory. It had to be, and what was that—what was the loss of everything in com-

parison—— The larger loss deadened her to the smaller ones, which is not always the case. She had her own and Norah's clothes to pack, some books, a few insignificant trifles which she was allowed to retain, and the three unfinished pictures, which indeed, had they not been given to her, she felt she could have stolen. The little blurred sketch from the easel, a trifling subject, meaning little, but bearing in its smeared colours the last handwriting of poor Robert's despair; and that wistful face looking up from the depths, up to the bit of blue sky far above and the one star. Was that the Dives he had thought of, the soul in pain so wistful, so sad, yet scarcely able to despair? It was like his letter, a sacred appeal to her not on this earth only, but beyond—an appeal which would outlast death and the grave. "The door into hell," she did not understand, but she knew it had something to do with her husband's last agony. These mournful relics were all she had to take with her into the changed world.

A woman cannot weep violently when she is at work. Tears may come into her eyes, tears may drop among the garments in which her past is still existing, but her movements to and fro, her occupations stem the full tide and arrest it. Helen was quite calm. While Norah brought the things for her out of the drawers she talked to the child as ordinary people talk whose hearts are not broken. She had fallen into a certain stillness—a hush of feeling. It did her good to be astir. When the boxes were full and fastened she turned to her pictures, enveloping them carefully, protecting the edges with cushions of folded paper. Norah was still very busy in finding the cord for her, and holding the canvases in their place. The child had rummaged out a heap of old newspapers, with which the packing was being done. Suddenly she began to cry as she stood holding one in her hand.

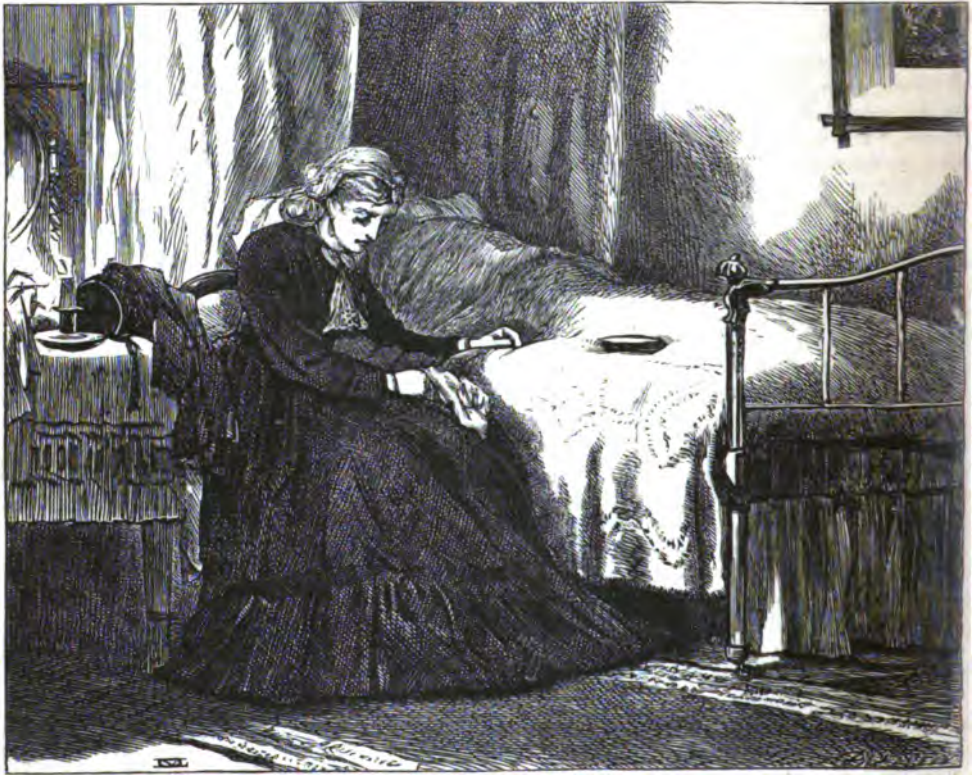
"Oh, mamma!" she said, looking up with big eyes in Helen's face. Crying was not so rare in the house as to surprise her mother. She said—

"Hush, my darling!" and went on. But when she felt the paper thrust into her hand, Helen stopped short in her task and looked, not at it but at Norah. The tears were hanging on the child's cheeks, but she had stopped crying. She pointed to one column in the paper and watched her mother with eyes like those of Dives in the picture. Helen gave a cry when she looked a

"Ah!" as if some sharp blow had been given to her. It was the name, nothing but her husband's name, that had pierced her like a sudden dagger. But she read on, without doubting, without thinking. It was the article written two days before on the history of the painter Drummond, "the wretched man," who had furnished a text for a sermon to the *Daily Semaphore*.

Norah had read only a sentence at the beginning which she but partially understood. It was something unkind, something untrue about "poor papa." But she read her

mother now instead, comprehending it by her looks. Helen went over the whole without drawing breath. It brought back the blood to her pale cheeks; it ran like a wild new life into every vein, into every nerve. She turned round in the twinkling of an eye, without a pause for thought, and put on the black bonnet with its overwhelming crape veil which had been brought to her that morning. She had not wanted it before. It was the first time in her life that she had required to look at the world through those folds of crape.



See page 77.

"May I come too, mamma?" said Norah softly. She did not know where they were going; but henceforward where her mother was there was the place for Norah, at home or abroad, sleeping or waking. The child clung to Helen's hand as they opened the familiar door, and went out once again—after a lifetime—into the once familiar, the changed and awful world. A summer evening, early June, the bloom newly off the lilacs, the first roses coming on the trees; the strange daylight dazzled them, the sound of passing voices buzzed and echoed as if they had been the

centre of a crowd. Or rather, this was their effect upon Helen. Norah clinging to her hand, pressed close to her side, watched her, and thought of nothing more.

Dr. Maurice was going to his solitary dinner. He had washed his hands and made himself daintily nice and tidy, as he always was; but he had not changed his morning coat. He was standing with his back against the writing-table in his library, looking up dreamily at poor Drummond's picture, and waiting for the sound of the bell which should summon him into the next

room to his meal. When the door bell sounded instead impatience seized him.

"What fool can be coming now?" he said to himself, and turned round in time to see John's scared face peeping into the room before he introduced those two figures, those two with their dark black dresses, the one treading in the very steps of the other, moving with her movement. He gave a cry of surprise. He had not seen them since the day after Drummond's death. He had gone to inquire, and had left anxious kind messages, but he, too, had conventional ideas in his mind and had thought the widow "would not be able" to see any one. Yet now she had come to him—

"Dr. Maurice," she said, with no other preliminary, coming forward to the table with her newspaper, holding out no hand, giving him no salutation, while Norah moved with her step for step, like a shadow. "Dr. Maurice, what does this mean?"

CHAPTER XVI

I WOULD not like to say what despairing thought Dr. Maurice might have had about his dinner in the first moment when he turned round and saw Helen Drummond's pale face under her crape veil, but there were many thoughts on the subject in his household, and much searchings of heart. John had been aghast at the arrival of visitors, and especially of such visitors at such a moment; but his feelings would not permit him to carry up dinner immediately, or to sound the bell, the note of warning.

"I canna do it, I canna do it—don't ask me," he said, for John was a north-countryman, and when his heart was moved fell back upon his old idiom.

"Maybe the lady would eat a bit herself, poor soul," the cook said in insinuating tones. "I've known folks eat in a strange house, for the strangeness of it like, when they couldn't swallow a morsel in their own."

"Don't ask me!" said John, and he seized a stray teapot and began to polish it in the trouble of his heart. There was silence in the kitchen for ten minutes at least, for the cook was a mild woman till driven to extremities; but to see fish growing into wool and potatoes to lead was more than any one could be expected to bear.

"Do you see that?" she said in despair, carrying the dish up to him, and thrusting it under his eyes. John threw down his teapot and fled. He went and sat on the stairs to be out of reach of her remonstrances. But the spectre of that fish went with him, and

would not leave his sight; the half-hour chimed, the three-quarters—

"I canna stand this no longer!" John said in desperation, and rushing up to the dining-room, sounded the dinner bell.

Its clang disturbed the little party in the next room who were so differently occupied. Helen was seated by the table with a pile of papers before her; her hands trembled as she turned from one to another, but her attention did not swerve. She was following through them every scrap that bore upon that one subject. Dr. Maurice had procured them all for her. He had felt that one time or other she must know all, and that then her information must be complete. He himself was walking about the room with his hands in his pocket, now stopping to point out or explain something, now taking up a book, unsettled and unhappy, as a man generally looks when he has to wait, and has nothing to do. He had sought out a book for Norah, to the attractions of which the poor child had gradually yielded. At first she had stood close by her mother. But the contents of those papers were not for Norah's eye, and Helen herself had sent her away. She had put herself in the window, her natural place; the ruddy evening light streamed in upon her, and found out between the black of her dress and that of her hat, a gleam of brown hair, to which it gave double brightness by the contrast; and gradually she fell into her old attitude, her old absorption. Dr. Maurice walked about the room, and pondered a hundred things. He would have given half he possessed for that fatherless child who sat reading in the light, and forgetting her childish share of sorrow. The mother in her mature beauty was little to him—but the child—a child like that! And she was not his. She was Robert Drummond's, who lay drowned at the bottom of the river, and whose very name was drowned too in those bitter waters of calumny and shame. Strange providence that metes so unequally to one and to another. The man did not think that he too might have had a wife and children had he so chosen; but his heart hankered for this that was his neighbour's, and which no magic, not even any subtle spell of love or protecting tenderness could ever make his own.

And Helen, almost unconscious of the presence of either, read through those papers which had been preserved for her. She read Golden's letter, and the comment upon it. She read the letter which Dr. Maurice had written, contradicting those cruel assertions,

She read the further comments upon that. How natural it was; how praiseworthy was the vehemence of friends in defence of the dead—and how entirely without proof! The newspaper pointed out with a cold distinctness, which looked like hatred to Helen, that the fact of the disappearance of the books told fatally against "the unhappy man." Why did he destroy those evidences which would no doubt have cleared him had he acted fairly and honestly? Day by day she traced the course of this controversy which had been going on while she had shut herself up in the darkness. It gleamed across her as she turned from one to another that this was why her energy had been preserved and her strength sustained. She had not broken down like other women, for this cause. God had kept her up for this. The discussion had gone on down to that very morning, when a little editorial note, appended to a short letter—one of the many which had come from all sorts of people in defence of the painter—had announced that such a controversy could no longer be carried on "in these pages." "No doubt the friends of Mr. Drummond will take further steps to prove the innocence of which they are so fully convinced," it said, "and it must be evident to all parties that the columns of a newspaper is not the place for a prolonged discussion on a personal subject." Helen scarcely spoke while she read all these. She did not hear the dinner-bell. The noise of the door when Dr. Maurice rushed to it with threatening word and look, to John's confusion, scarcely moved her. "Be quiet, dear," she said unconsciously, when the doctor's voice in the hall, where he had fallen upon his servant, came faintly into her abstraction. "You rascal! how dare you take such a liberty when you knew who was with me?" was what Dr. Maurice was saying, with rage in his voice. But to Helen it seemed as if little Norah, forgetting the cloud of misery about her, had begun to talk more lightly than she ought. "Oh, my child, be quiet," she repeated; "be quiet!" All her soul was absorbed in this. She had no room for any other thought.

Dr. Maurice came back with a flush of anger on his face. "These people would think it necessary to consider their miserable dishes if the last judgment were coming on," he said. He was a kind man, and very sorry for his friend's widow. He would have given up much to help her; but perhaps he too was hungry, and the thought of the spoilt dishes increased his vehemence. She looked

at him, putting back her veil with a blank look of absolute incomprehension. She had heard nothing, knew nothing. Comfort, and dinners, and servants, and all the paraphernalia of ordinary life, were a hundred miles away from her thoughts.

"I have read them all," she said in a tone so low that he had to stoop to hear her. "Oh, that I should have lost so much time in selfish grieving! I thought nothing more could happen after. Dr. Maurice, do you know what I ought to do?"

"You!" he said. There was something piteous in her look of appeal. The pale face and the gleaming eyes, the helplessness and the energy, all struck him at a glance—a combination which he did not understand.

"Yes—me! You will say what can I do? I cannot tell the world what he was, as you have done. Thanks for that," she said, holding out her hand to him. "The wife cannot speak for her husband, and I cannot write to the papers. I am quite ignorant. Dr. Maurice, tell me if you know. What can I do?"

Her gleam of wild indignation was gone. It had sunk before the controversy, the discussion which the newspapers would no longer continue. If poor Robert had met with no defenders, she would have felt herself inspired. But his friends had spoken, friends who could speak. And deep depression fell over her. "Oh!" she said, clasping her hands, "must we bear it? Is there nothing—nothing I can do?"

Again and again had he asked himself the same question. "Mrs. Drummond," he said, "you can do nothing; try and make up your mind to it. I hoped you might never know. A lady can do nothing in a matter of business. You feel yourself that you cannot write or speak. And what good would it do even if you could? I say that a more honourable man never existed. You could say, I know, a great deal more than that; but what does it matter without proof? If we could find out about those books——"

"He did not know anything about books," said Helen; "he could not even keep his own accounts—at least it was a trouble to him. Oh, you know that; how often have we—laughed—Oh, my God, my God!"

Laughed! The words brought the tears even to Dr. Maurice's eyes. He put his hand on her arm and patted it softly, as if she had been a child. "Poor soul! poor soul!" he said; the tears had got into his voice too, and all his own thoughts went out of his mind in the warmth of his sympathy.

He was a cautious man, not disposed to commit himself; but the touch of such emotion overpowered all his defences. "Look here, Mrs. Drummond," he said; "I don't know what we may be able to do, but I promise you something shall be done—I give you my word. The shareholders are making a movement already, but so many of them are ruined, so many hesitate, as people say, to throw good money after the bad. I don't know why I should hesitate, I am sure. I have neither chick nor child." He glanced at Norah as he spoke—at Norah lost in her book, with the light in her hair, and her outline clear against the window. But Helen did not notice, did not think what he could mean, being absorbed in her own thoughts. She watched him, notwithstanding, with dilating eyes. She saw all that at that moment she was capable of seeing in his face—the rising resolution that came with it, the flash of purpose. "It ought to be done," he said, "even for justice. I will do it—for that—and for Robert's sake."

She held out both her hands to him in the enthusiasm of her ignorance. "Oh, God bless you! God reward you!" she said. It seemed to her as if she had accomplished all she had come for, and had cleared her husband's name. At least his friend had pledged himself to do it, and it seemed to Helen so easy. He had only to refute the lies which had been told; to prove how true, how honest, how tender, how good, incapable of hurting a fly; even how simple and ignorant of business, more ignorant almost than she was, he had been; a man who never had kept any books, not even his own accounts; who had a profession of his own, quite different, at which he worked; who had not been five times in the City in his life before he became connected with Rivers's. After she had bestowed that blessing, it seemed to her almost as if she were making too much of it, as if she had but to go herself and tell it all, and prove his whitest innocence. To go herself—but she did not know where.

Dr. Maurice came down with a little tremulousness of excitement about him from the pinnacle of that resolution. He knew better what it was. Her simple notion of "going and telling" resolved itself, in his mind, to an action before the law-courts, to briefs, and witnesses, and expenditure. But he was a man without chick or child; he was not ruined by Rivers's. The sum he had lost had been enough to give him an interest in the question, not enough to injure his powers of operation. And it was a question

of justice, a matter which some man ought to take up. Nevertheless it was a great resolution to take. It would revolutionise his quiet life, and waste the substance which he applied, he knew, to many good uses. He felt a little shaken when he came down. And then—his dinner, the poor friendly unfortunate man!

"Let Norah come and eat something with me," he said, "the child must be tired. Come too and you shall have a chair to rest in, and we will not trouble you; and then I will see you home."

"Ah!" Helen gave an unconscious cry at the word. But already, even in this one hour, she had learned the first hard lesson of grief, which is that it must not fatigue others with its eternal presence—that they who suffer most must be content often to suffer silently, and put on such smiles as are possible—the ghost must not appear at life's commonest board any more than at the banquet. It seemed like a dream when five minutes later she found herself seated in an easy-chair in Dr. Maurice's dining-room, painfully swallowing some wine, while Norah sat at the table by him and shared his dinner. It was like a dream; twilight had begun to fall by this time, and the lamp was lighted on the table—a lamp which left whole acres of darkness all round in the long dim room. Helen sat and looked at the bright table and Norah's face, which turning to her companion began to grow bright too, unawares. A fortnight is a long age of trouble to a child. Norah's tears were still ready to come, but the bitterness was out of them. She was sad for sympathy now. And this change, the gleam of light, the smile of her old friend—his fond, half-mocking talk, felt like happiness come back. Her mother looked on from the shady corner where she was sitting, and understood it all. Robert's friend loved him; but was glad now to pass to other matters, to common life. And Robert's child loved him; but she was a child, and she was ready to reply to the first touch of that same dear life. Helen was growing wiser in her trouble. A little while ago she would have denounced this changeableness, and struggled against it. But now she understood and accepted what was out of her power to change.

And then in the pauses of his talk with Norah, which was sweet to him, Dr. Maurice heard all their story—how the house was already in the creditors' hands, how they had prepared all their scanty possessions to go away, and how Mr. Burton had been very kind. Helen had not associated him in any

way with the assault on her husband's memory. She spoke of him with a half gratitude which filled the doctor with suppressed fury. He had been very kind—he had offered her a house.

"I thought you disliked Dura," he said with an impatience which he could not restrain.

"And so I did," she answered drearily, "as long as I could. It does not matter now."

"Then you will still go?"

"Still? Oh, yes; where should we go else? The whole world is the same to us now," said Helen. "And Norah will be happier in the country; it is good air."

"Good air!" said Dr. Maurice. "Good heavens, what can you be thinking of? And the child will grow up without any one to teach her, without a—friend. What is to be done for her education? What is to be done—Mrs. Drummond, I beg your pardon. I hope you will forgive me. I have got into a way of interfering and making myself ridiculous, but I did not mean——"

"Nay," said Helen gently, half because she felt so weary, half because there was a certain comfort in thinking that any one cared, "I am not angry. I knew you would think of what is best for Norah. But, Dr. Maurice, we shall be very poor."

He did not make any reply; he was half ashamed of his vehemence, and yet withal he was unhappy at this new change. Was it not enough that he had lost Drummond, his oldest friend, but he must lose the child too, whom he had watched ever since she was born? He cast a glance round upon the great room, which might have held a dozen people, and in his mind surveyed the echoing chambers above, of which but one was occupied. And then he glanced at Norah's face, still bright, but slightly clouded over, beside him, and thought of the pretty picture she had made in the library seated against the window. Burton, who was their enemy, who had been the chief agent in bringing them to poverty, could give them a home to shelter their houseless heads. And why could not he, who had neither chick nor child, who had a house so much too big for him, why could not he take them in? Just to have the child in the house, to see her now and then, to hear her voice on the stairs, or watch her running from room to room, would be all he should want. They could live there and harm nobody, and save their little pitance. This thought ran through his mind, and then he stopped and confounded Burton.

But Burton had nothing to do with it. He had better have confounded the world, which would not permit him to offer shelter to his friend's widow. He gave a furtive glance at Helen in the shadow. He did not want Helen in his house. His friend's wife had never attracted him; and though he would have been the kindest of guardians to his friend's widow, still there was nothing in her that touched his heart. But he could not open his doors to her and say, "Come." He knew if he did so how the men would grin and the women whisper; how impertinent prophecies would flit about, or slanders much worse than impertinent. No, he could not do it; he could not have Norah by, to help on her education, to have a hand in her training, to make her a child of his own. He had no child. It was his lot to live alone and have no soft hand ever in his. All this was very ridiculous, for, as I have said before, Dr. Maurice was very well off; he was not old nor bad-looking, and he might have married like other men. But then he did not want to marry. He wanted little Norah Drummond to be his child, and he wanted nothing more.

Helen leaned back in her chair without any thought of what was passing through his heart. That her child should have inspired a *grande passion* at twelve had never entered her mind, and she took his words in their simplicity and pondered over them. "I can teach her myself," she said with a tremor in her voice. This man was not her friend, she knew. He had no partial good opinion of her, such as one likes one's friends to have, but judged her on her merits, which few people are vain enough to put much trust in; and she thought that very likely he would not think her worthy of such a charge. "I have taught her most of what she knows," she added with a little more confidence. "And then the great thing is, we shall be very poor."

"Forgive me!" he said; "don't say any more. I was unpardonably rash—impertinent—don't think of what I said."

And then he ordered his carriage for them and sent them home. I do not know whether perhaps it did not occur to Helen as she drove back through the summer dusk to her dismantled house what a difference there was between their destitution and poverty and all the warm glow of comfort and ease which surrounded this lonely man. But there can be no doubt that Norah thought of it, who had taken in everything with her brown eyes, though she said little. While they were driving along in the luxurious smoothly-rolling brougham, the child crept close to her

mother, clasping Helen's arm with both her hands. "Oh, mamma," she said, "how strange it is that we should have lost everything and Dr. Maurice nothing, that he should have that great house and this nice carriage, and us be driven away from St. Mary's Road! What can God be thinking of, mamma?"

"Oh, Norah, my dear child, we have each other, and he has nobody," said Helen; and in her heart there was a frenzy of triumph over this man who was so much better off than she was. The poor so often have that consolation; and sometimes it is not much of a consolation after all. But Helen felt it to the bottom of her heart as she drew her child to her, and felt the warm, soft clasp of hands, the round cheek against her own. Two desolate, lonely creatures in their black dresses—but two, and together; whereas Dr. Maurice, in his wealth, in his strength, in what the world would have called his happiness, was but one.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE pretty house in St. Mary's Road—what a change had come upon it! There was a great painted board in front describing the desirable residence, with studio attached, which was to be let. The carpets were half taken up and laid in rolls along the floor, the chairs piled together, the costly, pretty furniture, so carefully chosen, the things which belonged to the painter's early life, and those which were the product of poor Drummond's wealth, all removed and jumbled together, and ticketed "Lot 16," "Lot 20." "Lot 20" was the chair which had been Helen's chair for years—the one poor Robert had kissed. If she had known that, she would have spent her last shilling to buy it back out of the rude hands that turned it over. But even Helen only knew half of the tragedy which had suddenly enveloped her life. They threaded their way up-stairs to their bedroom through all those ghosts. It was still early; but what could they do down-stairs in the house which no longer retained a single feature of home? Helen put her child to bed, and then sat down by her, shading the poor little candle. It was scarcely quite dark even now. It is never dark in June. Through the open window there came the sound of voices, people walking about the streets after their work was over. There are so many who have only the streets to walk in, so many to whom St. Mary's Road, with its lilacs and laburnums and pretty houses, was pleasant and fresh as if it had been in the depths of the country. Helen saw them

from the window, coming and going, so often two, arm in arm, two who loitered and looked up at the lighted house, and spoke softly to each other, making their cheerful comments. The voices sounded mellow, the distant rattle of carriages was softened by the night, and a soft wind blew through the lilacs, and some stars looked wistfully out of the pale sky. Why are they so sad in summer those lustrous stars? Helen looked out at them, and big tears fell softly out of her eyes. Oh, face of Dives looking up! Oh, true and kind and just and gentle soul! Must she not even think of him as in heaven, as hidden in God with the dead who depart in faith and peace, but gone elsewhere, banished for ever? The thought crossed her like an awful shadow, but did not sting. There are some depths of misery to which healthy nature refuses to descend, and this was one. Had she *felt* as many good people feel on this subject, and as she herself believed theoretically that she felt, I know what Helen would have done. She would have gone down to that river and joined him in his own way, wherever he was, choosing it so. No doubt, she would have been wrong. But she did not descend into that abyss. She kept by her faith in God instinctively, not by any doctrine. Did not God *know*? But even the edge of it, the shadow of the thought was enough to chill her from head to foot. She stole in from the window, and sat down at the head of the bed where Norah lay, and tried to think. She had thought there could be no future change, no difference one way or other; but since this very morning what changes there were!—her last confidence shattered, her last comfort thrust from her. Robert's good name! She sat quite silent for hours thinking it over while Norah slept. Sometimes for a moment it went nigh to make her mad. Of all frantic things in the world, there is nothing like that sense of impotence—to feel the wrong and to be unable to move against it. It woke a feverish irritation in her, a *sour* resentment, a rage which she could not overcome, nor satisfy by any exertion. What could she do, a feeble woman, against the men who had cast this stigma on her husband? She did not even know who they were, except Golden. It was he who was the origin of it all, and whose profit it was to prove himself innocent by the fable of Robert's guilt. Robert's guilt! It was the most horrible farce, a farce which was a tragedy, which every one who knew him must laugh at wildly among their tears. But then the

world did not know him; and the world likes to think the worst, to believe in guilt as the one thing always possible. That there were people who knew better had been proved to her—people who had ventured to call out indignantly, and say, "This is not true," without waiting to be asked. Oh, God bless them! God bless them! But they were not the world.

When the night was deeper, when the walkers outside had gone, when all was quiet, except now and then the hurried step of a late passer-by, Helen went to the window once more, and looked out upon that world. What a little bit of a world it is that a woman can see from her window!—a few silent roofs and closed windows, one or two figures going and coming, not a soul whom she knew or could influence; but all those unknown people, when they heard her husband's name, if it were years and years hence, would remember the slander that had stained it, and would never know his innocence, his incapacity even for such guilt. This is what gives force to a lie, this is what gives bitterness, beyond telling, to the hearts of those who are impotent, whose contradiction counts for nothing, who have no proof, but only certainty. What a night it was!—like Paradise even in London. The angels might have been straying through those blue depths of air, through the celestial warmth and coolness, without any derogation from their high estate. It was not moonlight, nor starlight, nor dawn, but some heavenly combination of all three which breathed over the blue arch above, so serene, so deep, so unfathomable; and down below the peopled earth lay like a child, defenceless and trustful in the arms of its Maker. "Dear God, the very city seems asleep!" But here was one pair of eyes that no sleep visited, which dared not look up to heaven too closely lest her dead should not be there; which dared not take any comfort in the pity of earth, knowing that it condemned while it pitied. God help the solitary, the helpless, the wronged, those who can see no compensation for their sufferings, no possible alchemy that can bring good out of them! Helen crept to bed at last, and slept. It was the only thing in which there remained any consolation; to be unconscious, to shut out life and light and all that accompanies them; to be for an hour, for a moment, as good as dead. There are many people always, to whom this is the best blessing remaining in the world.

The morning brought a letter from Mr.

Burton, announcing that the house at Dura was ready to receive his cousin. Helen would have been thankful to go but for the discovery she had made on the previous day. After that it seemed to her that to be on the spot, to be where she could maintain poor Robert's cause, or hear of others maintaining it, was all she wanted now in the world. But this was a mere fancy, such as the poor cannot indulge in. She arranged everything to go to her new home on the next day. It was time at least that she should leave this place in which her own room was with difficulty preserved to her for another night. All the morning the mother and daughter shut themselves up there, hearing the sounds of the commotion below—the furniture rolled about here and there, the heavy feet moving about the uncarpeted stairs and rooms that already sounded hollow and vacant. Bills of the sale were in all the windows; the very studio, the place which now would have been sacred if they had been rich enough to indulge in fancies. But why linger upon such a scene? The homeliest imagination can form some idea of circumstances which in themselves are common enough.

In the afternoon the two went out—to escape from the house more than anything else. "We will go and see the Haldanes," Helen said to her child; and Norah wondered, but acquiesced gladly. Mrs. Drummond had never taken kindly to the fact that her husband's chief friend lived in Victoria Villas, and was a Dissenting minister with a mother and sister who could not be called gentlewomen. But all that belonged to the day of her prosperity, and now her heart yearned for some one who loved Robert—some one who would believe in him—to whom no vindication, even in thought, would be necessary. And the Haldanes had been ruined by Rivers's. This was another bond of union. She had called but once upon them before, and then under protest; but now she went nimbly, almost eagerly, down the road, past the line of white houses with their railings. There had been much thought and many discussions over Mr. Burton's proposal within those walls. They had heard of it nearly a fortnight since, but they had not yet made any formal decision; that is to say, Mrs. Haldane was eager to go; Miss Jane had made a great many calculations, and decided that the offer ought to be accepted as a matter of duty; but Stephen's extreme reluctance still kept them from settling. Something, however, had occurred that morning which had added a sting

to Stephen's discouragement, and taken away the little strength with which he had faintly maintained his own way. In the warmth and fervour of his heart, he had used his little magazine to vindicate his friend. A number of it had been just going to the press when the papers had published Drummond's condemnation, and Haldane, who knew him so well—all his weakness and his strength—had dashed into the field and proclaimed, in the only way that was possible to him, the innocence and excellence of his friend. All his heart had been in it; he had made such a sketch of the painter, of his genius (poor Stephen thought he had genius), of his simplicity and goodness and unimpeachable honour, as would have filled the whole denomination with delight, had the subject of the sketch been one of its potentates or even a member of Mr. Haldane's chapel. But Robert was not even a Dissenter at all, he had nothing to do with the denomination; and, to tell the truth, his *bløge* was out of place. Perhaps Stephen himself felt it was so after he had obeyed the first impulse which prompted it. But at least he was not left long in doubt. A letter had reached him from the magazine committee that morning. They had told him that they could not permit their organ to be made the vehicle of private feeling; they had suggested an apology in the next number; and they had threatened to take it altogether out of his hands. Remonstrances had already reached them, they said, from every quarter as to the too secular character of the contents; and they ventured to remind Mr. Haldane that this was not a mere literary journal, but the organ of the body, and intended to promote its highest, its spiritual interests. Poor Stephen! he was grieved, and he writhed under the pinch of this interference. And then the magazine not only brought him in the half of his income, but was the work of his life—he had hoped to “do some good” that way. He had aimed at improving it, cutting short the gossip and scraps of local news, and ‘putting in something of a higher character. In this way he had been able to persuade himself through all his helplessness, that he still possessed some power of influence over the world. He had been so completely subdued by the attack, that he had given in about Mr. Burton's house, and that very day the proposal had been accepted; but he had not yet got the assault itself out of his head. All the morning he had been sitting with the manuscripts and proofs before him which

were to make up his new number, commenting upon them in the bitterness of his heart.

“I suppose I must put this in now, whether I like it or not,” he said. “I never suspected before how many pangs ruin brings with it, mother; not one, but a legion. They never dreamt of interfering with me before. Now look at this rabid, wretched thing. I would put it in the fire if I dared, and free the world of so much ill-tempered folly; but Bateman wrote it, and I dare not. Fancy, I *dare* not! If I had been independent, I should have made a stand. And my magazine—all the little comfort I had—”

“Oh Stephen, my dear! but what does it matter what you put in if they like it? You are always writing, writing, wearing yourself out. Why shouldn't they have some of the trouble? You oughtn't to mind—”

“But I do mind,” he said, with a feeble smile. “It is all I have to do, mother. It is to me what I am to you; you would not like to see me neglected, fed upon husks, like the prodigal.”

“Oh, Stephen dear, how can you talk so?—you neglected!” said his mother with tears in her eyes.

“Well, that is what I feel, mother. I shall have to feed my child with husks—tea-meetings and reports of this and that chapel, and how much they give. They were afraid of me once; they dared not grumble when I rejected and cut out; but—it is I who dare not now.”

Mrs. Haldane wisely made no reply. In her heart she had liked the magazine better when it was all about the tea-meetings and the progress of the good cause. She liked the bits of sectarian gossip, and to know how much the different chapels subscribed, which congregation had given its minister a silver teapot, and which had given him his dismissal. All this was more interesting to her than all Stephen's new-fangled discussions of public matters, his eagerness about education and thought, and a great many other things that did not concern his mother. But she held this opinion within herself, and was as indignant with the magazine committee as heart could desire. The two fell silent for some time, he going on with his literature, and she with her sewing, till the only servant they had left, a maiden, called *par excellence* “the girl,” came in with a tray laden with knives and forks to lay the cloth for dinner. The girl's eyes were red, and a dirty streak across one cheek showed where her tears had been wiped away with her apron.

"What is the matter?" said Mrs. Haldane.

"Oh, please it's Miss Jane," cried the handmaid. "She didn't ought to speak so; oh, she didn't ought to. My mother's a seat-holder in our chapel, and I'm a member. I'm not a-going to bear it! We ain't folks to be pushed about."

"Lay the cloth, and do it quietly," said the old lady. And with a silent exasperation, such as only a woman can feel, she watched the unhandy creature. "Thank heaven, we shall want no girl in the country," she said to herself. But when her eye fell on Stephen, he was actually smiling—smiling at the plea for exception, with that mingled sadness and bitterness which it pained his mother to see. The girl went on sniffing and sobbing all the same. She had already driven her other mistress almost frantic in the kitchen. Miss Jane had left a little stew, a savoury dish such as Stephen's fanciful appetite required to tempt it, by the fire, slowly coming to perfection. "The girl" had removed it to the fender, where it was standing, growing cold, just at the critical moment when all its juices should have been blending under the gentle, genial influence of the fire. Common cooks cannot stew. They can boil, or they can burn; but they never catch the delicious medium between. Only such persons as cook for love, or such as possess genius, can hit this more than golden mean. Miss Jane combined both characters. She did it *con amore* and *per amore*; and when she found her fragrant dish set aside for the sake of "the girl's" kettle, her feelings can be but faintly imagined by the uninitiated. "I wish I could beat you," she said, with natural exasperation. And this to "a joined member," a seat-holder's daughter! Stephen laughed when the tale was repeated to him, with a laugh which was full of bitterness. He tried to swallow his portion of the stew, but it went against him. "It is the same everywhere," he said; "the same subjection of the wise to the foolish, postponing of the best to the worst. Rubbish to please the joined members—silence and uselessness to us."

"Oh, Stephen!" said Mrs. Haldane, "you know I am not always of your way of thinking. After all there is something in it; for when a girl is a church member, she can't be quite without thought; and when she neglects her work, it is possible, you know, that she might be occupied with better things. I don't mean to say that it is an excuse."

"I should think not, indeed," said Miss Jane. "I'd rather have some one that knew her work, and did it, than a dozen church members. A heathen to-day would have been as much use to me."

"That may be very true," said her mother; "but I think, considering Stephen's position, that such a thing should not be said by you or me. In my days a person stood up for chapel, through thick and thin, especially when he had a relation who was a minister. You think you are wiser, you young ones, and want to set up for being liberal, and think church as good as chapel, and the world, so far as I can make out, as good as either. But that way of thinking would never answer me."

"Well, thank heaven," said Miss Jane in a tone of relief, "in the country we shall not want any 'girl.'"

"That is what I have been thinking," said Mrs. Haldane with alacrity; and in the painful moment which intervened while the table was being cleared and the room put in order, she painted to herself a fancy picture of "the country." She was a Londoner born, and had but an imperfect idea what the word meant. It was to her a vague vision of greenness, parks and trees and great banks of flowers. The village street was a thing she had no conception of. A pleasant dream of some pleasant room opening on a garden, and level with it, crossed her mind. It was a cottage of romance, one of those cottages which make their appearance in the stories which she half disapproved of, yet felt a guilty pleasure in reading. There had been one, an innocent short one, with the gentlest of good meanings, in the last number of Stephen's magazine, with just such a cottage in it, where a sick heroine recovered. She thought she could see the room, and the invalid chair outside the door, in which he could be wheeled into the garden to the seat under the apple-tree. Her heart overflowed with that pleasant thought. And Stephen might get well! Such a joy was at the end of every vista to Mrs. Haldane. She sat and dreamed over this with a smile on her face while the room was being cleared; and her vision was only stayed by the unusual sound of Helen's knock at the door.

"It will be some one to see the house," said Miss Jane, and she went away hurriedly, with loud-whispered instructions to the girl, into "the front drawing-room," to be ready to receive any applicant; so that Miss Jane was not in the room when Helen with her heart beating, and Norah clinging close to

her as her shadow, was shown abruptly into the invalid's room. "The girl" thrust her in without a word of introduction or explanation. Norah was familiar in the place, though her mother was a stranger. Mrs. Haldane rose hastily to meet them, and an agitated speech was on Helen's lips that she had come to say good-bye, that she was going away, that they might never meet again in this world,—when her eye caught the helpless figure seated by the window, turning a half-surprised, half-sympathetic look upon her. She had never seen poor Stephen since his illness, and she was not prepared for this complete and lamentable overthrow. It drove her own thoughts, even her own sorrows, out of her mind for the moment. She gave a cry of mingled wonder and horror. She had heard all about it, but seeing is so very different from hearing.

"Oh, Mr. Haldane!" she said, going up to him, forgetting herself—with such pity in her voice as he had not heard for years. It drove out of his mind, too, the more recent and still more awful occasion he had to pity her. He looked at her with sudden gratitude in his eyes.

"Yes, it is a change, is it not?" he said with a faint smile. He had been an Alpclimber, a mighty walker, when she saw him last.

Some moments passed before she recovered the shock. She sat down by him trembling, and then she burst into sudden tears—not that she was a woman who cried much in her sorrow, but that her nerves were affected beyond her power of control.

"Mr. Haldane, forgive me," she faltered. "I have never seen you since—and so much has happened—oh, so much!"

"Ah, yes," he said. "I could cry too—not for myself, for that is an old story. I would have gone to you, had I been able—you know that; and it is very, very kind of you to come to me."

"It is to say good-bye. We are going away to the country, Norah and I," said Helen; "there is no longer any place for us here. But I wanted to see you, to tell you—you seem—to belong—so much—to the old time."

Ah, that old time! the time which softens all hearts. It had not been perfect while it existed, but now how fair it was! Perhaps Stephen Haldane remembered it better than she did; perhaps it might even cross his mind that in that old time she had not cared much to see him, had not welcomed him to her house with any pleasure. But he was too

generous to allow himself even to think such a thought, in her moment of downfall. The depths were more bitter to her even than to him. He would not let the least shadow even in his mind fret her in her great trouble. He put out his hand, and grasped hers with a sympathy which was more telling than words.

"And I hope your mother will forgive me too," she said with some timidity. "I thought I had more command of myself. We could not go without coming to say good-bye."

"It is very kind—it is more than I had any right to expect," said Mrs. Haldane. "And we are going to the country too. We are going to Dura, to a house Mr. Burton has kindly offered to us. Oh, Mrs. Drummond, now I think of it, probably we owe it to you."

"No," said Helen, startled and mystified; and then she added slowly, "I am going to Dura too."

"Oh, how very lucky that is! Oh, how glad I am!" said the old lady. "Stephen, do you hear? Of course, Mr. Burton is your cousin; it is natural you should be near him. Stephen, this is good news for you. You will have Miss Norah, whom you were always so fond of, to come about you as she used to do—that is, if her mamma will allow her. Oh, my dear, I am so glad! I must go and tell Jane. Jane, here is something that will make you quite happy. Mrs. Drummond is coming too."

She went to the door to summon her daughter, and Helen was left alone with the sick man. She had not loved him in the old time, but yet he looked a part of Robert now, and her heart melted towards him. She was glad to have him to herself, as glad as if he had been a brother. She put her hand on the arm of his chair, laying a kind of doubtful claim to him. "You have seen what they say?" she asked, looking in his face.

"Yes, all; with fury," he said, "with indignation! Oh my God, that I should be chained here, and good for nothing! They might as well have said it of that child."

"Oh, is it not cruel, cruel!" she said.

These half-dozen words were all that passed between them, and yet they comforted her more than all Dr. Maurice had said. He had been indignant too, it is true; but not with this fiery, visionary wrath—the rage of the helpless, who can do nothing.

When Miss Jane came in with her mother, they did the most of the talking, and Helen



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shrunk into herself ; but when she had risen to go away, Stephen thrust a little packet into her hand. "Read it when you go home," he said. It was his little dissenting magazine, the insignificant brochure which she would have scorned so in the old days.

With what tears, with what swelling of her heart, with what an agony of pride and love and sorrow she read it that night !

And so the old house was closed, and the old life ended. Henceforward, everything that awaited her was cold and sad and new.



PART VII

CHAPTER XVIII.



ELEN had still another incident before her, however, ere she left St. Mary's Road. It was late in the afternoon when she went back. To go back at all, to enter the dismantled place, and have that new dreary picture thrust into

her mind instead of the old image of home, was painful enough, and Norah's cheeks were pale, and even to Helen, the air and the movement conveyed a certain relief. They went into the quieter part of the park and walked for an hour or two saying little. Now and then poor Norah would be beguiled into a little monologue, to which her mother lent a half attention—but that was all. It was easier to be in motion than to keep still, and it was less miserable to look at the trees, the turf, the blue sky, than at the walls of a room which was full of associations of happiness. They did not get home until the carriages were beginning to roll into the park for the final round before dinner. And when they reached their own house, there stood a smart cabriolet before it, the horse held by a little tiger. Within the gate two gentlemen met them coming down the steps. One of them was a youth of eighteen or nineteen, who looked at Helen with a wondering awe-stricken glance. The other was—Mr. Golden. Norah had closed the garden door heedlessly after her. They were thus shut in, the four together confronting each other, unable to escape. Helen could not believe her eyes. Her heart began to beat, her pale cheeks to flush, a kind of mist of excitement came before her vision. Mr. Golden, too, was not without a certain perturbation. He had not expected to see any

one. He took off his hat, and cleared his voice, and made an effort to seem at his ease. "I had just called," he said, "to express—to inquire—I did not know things had been so far advanced. I would not intrude—for the world."

"Oh!" cried Helen, facing him, standing between him and the door, "how dare you come here?"

"Dare, Mrs. Drummond? I—I don't understand——"

"You do understand," she said, "better—far better than any one else does. And how dare you come to look at your handiwork? A man may be what you are, and yet have a little shame. Oh, you robber of the dead! if I had been anything but a woman, you would not have ventured to look me in the face."

He did not venture to look her in the face then; he looked at his companion instead, opening his eyes, and nodding his head slightly, as if to imply that she was crazed. "It is only a woman who can insult a man with impunity," he said, "but I hope I am able to make allowance for your excited feelings. It is natural for a lady to blame some one, I suppose. Rivers, let us go."

"Not till I have spoken," she cried in her excitement. "This is but a boy, and he ought to know whom he is with. Oh, how is it that I cannot strike you down and trample upon you? If I were to call that policeman he would not take you, I suppose. You liar and thief! don't dare to answer me. What, at my own door; at the door of the man whose good name you have stolen, whom you have slandered in his grave—oh my God! who has not even a grave because you drove him mad!" she cried, her eyes blazing, her cheeks glowing, all the silent beauty of her face growing splendid in her passion.

The young man gazed at her as at an apparition, his lips falling apart, his face paling. He had never heard such a voice, never seen such an outburst of outraged human feeling before.

"Mrs. Drummond, this is madness. I—I can make allowance for—for excitement——"

"Be silent, sir," cried Helen, in her fury. "Who do you suppose cares what you think? And how dare you open your mouth before me? It is I who have a right to speak.

And I wish there were a hundred to hear instead of one. This man had absconded till he heard my husband was dead. Then he came back and assumed innocence, and laid the blame on him who—could not reply. I don't know who you are; but you are young, and you should have a heart. There is not a liar in England—not a thing so vile as this man. He has plundered the dead of his good name. Now go, sir. I have said what I had to say."

"Mrs. Drummond, sometime you will have to answer—sometime you will repent of this," cried Golden, losing his presence of mind.

"I shall never repent it, not if you could kill me for it," cried Helen. "Go; you make the place you stand on vile. Take him away from my sight. I have said what I had to say."

Mr. Golden made an effort to recover himself. He struck his young companion on the shoulder with an attempt at jocularly.

"Come, Rivers," he said, "come along, we are dismissed. Don't you see we are no longer wanted here?"

But the lad did not answer the appeal. He stayed behind with his eyes still fixed upon Helen.

"Please, don't blame me," he said. "Tell me if I can do anything. I—did not know——"

"Thank you," she said faintly. Her excitement had failed her all at once. She had put her arms round Norah, and was leaning upon her, haggard and pale as if she were dying. "Thank you," she repeated, with a motion of her hand towards the door.

The youth stole out with a sore heart. He stood for a moment irresolute on the pavement. The cab was his and not Golden's; but that personage had got into it, and was calling to him to follow.

"Thanks," said young Rivers, with the impetuosity of his years. "I shall not trouble you. Go on pray. I prefer to walk."

And he turned upon his heel, and went rapidly away. He was gone before the other could realise it; and it was with feelings that it would be impossible to describe, with a consciousness that seemed both bodily and mental of having been beaten and wounded all over, with a singing in his ears, and a bewildered sense of punishment, that Golden picked up the reins and drove away. It was only a few sharp words from a woman's tongue, a thing which a man must steel himself to bear when his operations are of a kind which involve the ruin of families.

But Helen had given her blow far more skilfully, far more effectively than she was aware of. She had clutched at her first chance of striking, without any calculation of results; and the youth she had appealed to in her excitement might have been any nameless lad for what she knew. It was Mr. Golden's hard fate that he was not a nameless lad. He was Cyril Rivers, Lord Rivers' eldest son. The manager drove on a little way, slowly, and in great perturbation. And then he drew up the horse, and sprang to the ground.

"You had better go home," he said to the little groom.

And then, still with that sense of bodily suffering as well as mental, he made his way through Kensington Gardens to the drive. He was a man of fashion too, as well as a man of business—if he ever could hold up his head again.

Of course he did hold up his head, and in an hour after was ready to have made very good fun of the "scolding" he had received, and the impression it had made on his young companion.

"I don't wonder," he said; "though her rage was all against me, I could not help admiring her. You never can tell what a woman is till you see her in a passion. She was splendid. Her friends ought to advise her to go on the stage."

"Why should she go on the stage?" said some one standing by.

"Because she is left a beggar. She has not a penny, I suppose."

"It is lucky that you have suffered so little when so many people are beggared, Golden," said one of his fine friends.

This little winged shaft went right into the wound made by Helen's fiery lance, and so far as sensation went (which was nothing) Mr. Golden had not a happy time that night.

As for Helen, she went in, prostrated by her own vehemence, and threw herself down on her bed, and hid her face from the light. After the first excitement was over shame seized upon her. She had descended from her proper place. She had flown into this outburst of passion and rage before her child. She had lowered herself in Norah's eyes, as she thought—though the child would not take her arm from her neck, nor her lips from her cheek, but clung to her sobbing, "Oh, poor mamma! poor mamma!" with sympathetic passion. All this fiery storm through which she had passed had developed Norah. She had gained three or four years in a day. At one bound, from the child who

was a piece of still life in the family, deeply beloved, but not needed, by the two who were each other's companions, she had become, all at once, her mother's only stay, her partizan, her supporter, her comrade-in-arms. It is impossible to over-estimate the difference this makes in a child's, and especially in a girl's, life. It made of her an independent, thinking, acting-creature all in a moment. For years everything had been said before her under the supposition that Norah, absorbed in her book, heard nothing. But she had heard a thousand things. She knew all now without any need of explanation, as well as so young a mind could understand. And she began to grope in her mind towards further knowledge, to put things together which even her mother had not thought of.

"Do you know who the boy was, mamma?" she whispered, after she had sat a long time on the bed, silently consoling the sufferer. "Oh, I am so glad you spoke, he will never forget it. Now one more knows it besides you and me."

"There are others who know, dear," said Helen, who had still poor Stephen's magazine in her hand.

"Yes," said Norah. "Dr. Maurice and the people who wrote to the papers; but, mamma, nobody like you and me. Whatever they say we know. I am little, and I suppose I shall always be little; but that does not matter. I shall soon be grown up, and able to help. And, mamma, this shall be my work as well as yours—I shall never stop till it is done—never, all my life!"

"Oh, my darling!" cried Helen, clasping her child in her arms. It was not that she received the vow as the child meant it, or even desired that in Norah's opening life there should be nothing of more importance than this early self-devotion; but the sympathy was sweet to her beyond describing, the more that the little creature, who had played and chattered by her side, had suddenly become her friend. In the midst of her sorrow and pain, and even of the prostration, and sensitive visionary shame with which this encounter had filled her, she had one sudden throb of pleasure. She was not alone anymore.

It was Helen who fell asleep that evening worn out with emotion, and weariness, and suffering. And then Norah rose up softly, and made a pilgrimage by herself all over the deserted house. She went through the conservatory, where, of all the beautiful things poor Robert had loved to see, there remained nothing but the moonlight which

filled its emptiness; and into the studio, where she sat down on the floor beside the easel, and clasped her arms round it and cried. She was beginning to weary of the atmosphere of grief, beginning to long for life and sunshine, but yet she clung to the easel and indulged in one childish passion of sobs and tears. "Oh, papa!" That was all Norah said to herself. But the recollection of all he had been, and of all that had been done to him, surged over the child, and filled her with that sense of the intolerable which afflicts the weak. She could not bear it, yet she had to bear it; just as her mother, just as poor Haldane had to bear—struggling vainly against a power greater than theirs, acquiescing when life and strength ran low, sometimes for a moment divinely consenting, accepting the will of God. But it is seldom that even the experienced soul gets so far as that.

Next morning Mrs. Drummond and her daughter went to Dura. Their arrival at the station was very different from that of Mr. Burton. No eager porters rushed at them as they stepped out of the railway carriage; the station-master moved to the other side; they landed, and were left on the platform by themselves to count their boxes while the train swept on. It was the first time it had ever happened so to Helen. Her husband had always either been with her, or waiting for her, wherever she travelled. And she was weary with yesterday's agitation, and with all that had so lately happened. Norah came forward and took everything in hand. It was she who spoke to the porter, and set the procession in order.

"Cab? Bless you, miss! there ain't but one in the place, and it's gone on a 'xursion," he said, "but I'll get a wheelbarrow and take 'em down. It ain't more than ten minutes' walk."

"I know the way," said Helen; and she took her child's hand and walked on into the familiar place. She had not been there since her marriage; but oh! how well she knew it! She put her crape veil over her face to hide her from curious eyes; and it threw a black mist at the same time over the cheerful village. It seemed to Helen as if she was walking in a dream. She knew everything, every stone on the road, the names above the shops, the forms of the trees. There was one great elm, lopsided, which had lost a huge branch (how well she remembered!) by a thunderstorm when she was a child; was it all a dream? Everything looked like a dream except Norah; but Norah was real. As for the child, there was in her heart a lively

thrill of pleasure at sight of all this novelty which she could not quite subdue. She had no veil of crape over her eyes, and the red houses all lichened over, the glimpses of fields and trees, the rural aspect of the road, the vision of the common in the distance, all filled her with a suppressed delight. It was wrong, Norah knew; she called herself back now and then and sighed, and asked herself how she could be so devoid of feeling; but yet the reaction would come. She began to talk in spite of herself.

"I think some one might have come to meet us at the station," she said. "Ned might have come. He is a boy, and can go anywhere. I am sure, mamma, *we* would have gone to make them feel a little at home. Where is the Gatehouse? What is that place over there? Why there are shops—a draper's and a confectioner's—and a library! I am very glad there is a library. Mamma, I think I shall like it; is that the common far away yonder? Do you remember any of the people? I should like to know some girls if you will let me. There is little Clara, of course, who is my cousin. Do you think we shall live here always, mamma?"

Norah did not ask nor, indeed, look for any answer to this string of questions. She made a momentary pause of courtesy to leave room for a reply, should any come; but Helen's thoughts were full of the past, and as she made no answer Norah resumed the strain.

"It looks very cheerful here, mamma; though it is a village, it does not look dull. I like the red tiles on the cottages and all this red-brick; perhaps it is a little hot-looking now, but in winter it will be so comfortable. Shall we be able to get our things here without going to town? That seems quite a good shop. I wonder what Mrs. Burton and Clara do? But then they are so rich, and we are—poor. Shall I be able to have any lessons, mamma? Can I go on with my music? I wonder if Clara has a governess. She will think it very strange that you should teach me. But I am very glad; I like you better than twenty governesses. Mamma, will it make any difference between Clara and me, them being so rich and us so poor?"

"Oh, Norah, I cannot tell you. Don't ask so many questions," said Helen.

Norah was wounded; she did not give up her mother's hand, but she loosed her hold of it to show her feelings. She had been very sympathetic, very quiet, and respectful of the grief which in its intensity was beyond her; and now she seemed to herself to have

a right to a little sympathy in return. She could understand but dimly what was in her mother's mind; she did not know the associations of which Dura was full; and it was hard to be thus stopped short in that spring of renovating life. As she resigned herself to silence, a feeling of injury came over her; and here, just before her eyes, suddenly appeared a picture of life so different from hers. She saw a band of children gathered about the gate of a house, which stood at a short distance from the road, surrounded by shrubberies and distinguished by one great splendid cedar which stretched its glorious branches over the high garden wall behind, and made a point in the landscape. A lady was driving a little pony-carriage through the open gate, while the children stood watching and waving their hands to her. "Good-bye, mamma," "Don't be long," "And mind you bring back Clara with you," they were calling to her. With a wistful sense of envy Norah gazed and wondered who they were, and if she should ever know them. "Why are people so different?" she asked herself. She had nobody in the world but her mother, lost behind that crape veil, lost in her own thoughts, who told her not to ask questions, while those other little girls had a smiling mamma in a pretty pony-carriage, who was taking one to drive with her, and was to bring Clara back to see them. Which Clara? Was it the Clara who belonged to Norah, her own cousin, to whom she had a better right than any one? Norah's heart sank as she realised this. No doubt Clara must have many friends; she could not stand in need of Norah as Norah did of her. She would be a stranger, an interloper, a new little girl whom nobody knew, whom nobody perhaps would care to know. Tears came to the child's eyes. She had been a woman last night rising to the height of the tragedy in which her little life was involved; but now Nature had regained its sway, and she was only twelve years old. It was while her mind was occupied with these thoughts that her mother interrupted them, suddenly pressing her hand.

"Norah, this is our house, where we are to live," said Helen. Her voice faltered, she held the child's hand as if for support. And now they were at their own door.

Norah gazed at it with a certain dismay. She, too, like Mr. Haldane, had her theory about a house in the country. It must be like Southlees, she thought, though without the river; or perhaps as they had grown poor, it might be something a little better

than the lodge at Southlees, a little cottage; but she had never dreamed of anything like this tall red-brick house which twinkled at her with all its windows. She was awed and chilled, and a little frightened, as she crossed the road. Susan was standing at the open door parleying with the porter about their boxes, which she declined to admit till "the family" came. The one fear which possessed Susan's life, the fear of being "put upon," was strong in her at this moment. But she set the balance straight for Norah, by making a sudden curtsy, which tempted the child so sorely to laughter, that her eyes began to shine and her heart to rise once more. She ran up the white steps eagerly before her mother. "Oh, mamma, I am first. I can say welcome to you," she said.

But the sight of the drawing-room, into which Susan ushered them, solemnly closing the door after them, struck a moment's chill to Norah's heart. It seemed so strange to be thus shut in, as if it was not their own house but a prison. It was afternoon, and the sunshine had all gone from that side of the road, and the graceful, old-fashioned room looked dim and ghostly to eyes which had just come out of the light. The windows all draped with brown and grey, the old-fashioned slim grand piano in the corner ("I shall have my music," said Norah), the black japanned screen with its funny little pictures, the high carved mantelpiece with that square mirror which nobody could see into, puzzled the child, at once attracting and repelling her. There was another round, convex mirror like a shield, on the side wall, but even that did not enable Norah to see herself, it only made a little twinkling picture of her in a vast perspective of drawing-room. Helen had seated herself as soon as the door was shut, and there was she, too, in the picture like a lady come to call. What a strange, dim, ghostly place it was! The bumping of the boxes as they went upstairs was a comfort to Norah. It was a sound of life breaking the terrible silence. She asked herself what would happen when it was over. Should they fall under some charm and sleep there, like the enchanted princess, for a hundred years? And to think that all this was within reach of that lady in the pony-carriage, and of her children who waved their hands to her!—so near, yet in a different world.

"Mayn't we go and see the house, mamma?" Norah whispered, standing close to her mother's side. "Shouldn't you like to see where we are to sleep? Shouldn't you

like to get out of this room? It frightens me so; it feels like a prison. Oh, mamma! perhaps it would not look so strange—and so—dull—and so—funny," cried Norah, feeling disposed to cry, "if you would take your bonnet off."

Just at this moment there was a sound in the road which stirred the whole village into life; and roused Norah. She ran to the window to see what it was. It was an event which happened every evening, which all the children in Dura ran to see, though they were so familiar with it. It was Mr. Burton driving his high-stepping bays home from the station. He had come by the express made on purpose for him and such as him, which arrived half-an-hour later than the train by which the Drummonds had come. Norah climbed up on her knees on a chair to see over the little old-fashioned blinds. There was some one seated by Mr. Burton in the dog-cart, some one who looked at the Gatehouse, as Mr. Burton did, while they dashed past. At the sight of him Norah started, and from a little fantastical child became a woman all at once again. It was the young man who the day before had been with Mr. Golden at St. Mary's Road, he who had heard her father's vindication, and had believed it, and "was on our side," Norah felt, against all the world.

CHAPTER XIX.

THERE is always a little excitement in a village over a new inhabitant, and the Drummonds were not common strangers to bespeculated vaguely about. There were many people in Dura who remembered Helen in her beauty and youth. And next morning, when it became known that she had arrived at the Gatehouse, the whole place burst into gossip on the subject. Even the new people, the City people who lived in the white villas near the station, were moved by it. For poor Drummond's story was known everywhere, and his miserable fate, and the discussion in the newspapers. Even here, in the quietness of the country, people took sides, and public opinion was by no means so unanimous as poor Helen had supposed. The papers had accepted her husband's guilt as certain, but opinion was very much divided on the subject among people who had means of knowing. "Burton ought to have warned that poor fellow," one of the City gentlemen said to another at the station, going up by the early train. "I would not trust a simpleton in the hands of a smart man like Golden."

"Do you think he was a simpleton?" said the other.

"In business, yes——" said the first speaker. "How could he be otherwise? But, by Jove, sir, what a splendid painter! I never saw anything I liked better than that picture of his in the last Exhibition. Poor fellow! And to put him in Golden's hands, a man well known to be up to every dodge. I wonder what Burton could be thinking of. I wonder he can look that poor lady in the face."

"I should just like to find out how much Burton himself knew about it," said the other, nodding his head.

"And so should I," the first speaker said significantly, as they took their place in the train.

Thus it will be seen that the world, which Helen thought of so bitterly as all against her, was by no means so clear on the subject. At the breakfast-table in the Rectory the conversation took a still more friendly tone.

"I hear that poor Mrs. Drummond has come to the Gatehouse," said Mrs. Dalton. "I almost think I saw her yesterday—a tall woman, in a crape veil, with a little girl about Mary's size. I shall make a point of calling the first time I go out. Oh, George, what a sad, sad story! I hope she will let me be of some use to her."

"I don't see that you can be of much use," said her husband. "She has the Burtons, of course, to fall back upon. How strange to think of Helen Burton coming back here! I could not have supposed it possible. So proud a girl! And how that man at Dura could ask her! I suppose he feels the sweetness of revenge in it. Everybody knew she refused him."

"Oh George, hush! the children," cried Mrs. Dalton under her breath.

"Psha! everybody knows. What a difference it would have made to her, though! It is strange she should have chosen to come and live in sight of his splendour."

"Oh, do you think she cares about his splendour? Poor soul!" said kind Mrs. Dalton, with tears in her eyes. "She must have very different thoughts in her mind. Most likely she was glad of any shelter where she could hide her head, after all the newspapers and the publicity. Oh, George! it must be doubly hard upon her if she was proud."

"Probably it was her pride that made her husband such a fool," said the rector. "You women have a great deal to answer for. If she drove him into that thirst for money-

making—a thing he could know nothing about—— You are all fond of money——"

"For money's worth, George," said Mrs. Dalton humbly. She could not deny the accusation. For her own part she would have done anything for money—she with her eight children, and Charlie's education so dreadfully on her mind.

"Oh, I don't say you are miserly," said the rector, who was a literary man of superior mind, and hated to be bothered by family cares, which incapacitated him for thought; "but when a woman wants more than her husband can give her, what is the unhappy man to do? *Ne sutor ultra crepidam*. Which means, Mary——"

"I have heard it before," said his wife meekly. "I think I know what it means."

"Then you see what comes of it," said Mr. Dalton. "I don't believe a word that is in the papers. I seldom do. He went and got himself involved and bamboozled. How was he to know what he was doing? I don't blame poor Drummond, but I am not so sure it was not her fault."

At the great house the talk was different; there was no discussion of the rights or wrongs of the question. Mr. Burton, indeed, preferred not to speak of Mr. Drummond; and young Mr. Rivers, who had come down with him on the previous night, had got no opening to report the scene of which he had been a spectator. They were early people, and though they had entertained a large party the night before, their breakfast was earlier than that at the Rectory. They were all out on the lawn, visitors, children, dogs, and all, while Mr. Dalton drank his coffee. Ned was busily employed training the Skye to jump over a stick, an exercise which was not much to Shaggy's taste; while the big pointer (who was only in his babyhood, though he was so big, and was imbecile, as puppies are) looked on, and made foolish springs and vaults about his clever brother. Malta, in his blue ribbon, kept close by Mrs. Burton's side, and looked on at the performance with the contemptuous toleration of a superior being; and Clara, also decked with blue ribbons, hung by her mother too.

"You had better come with me and see Helen," said the head of the house. "I told you she arrived last night."

"Now!" said Mrs. Burton, with some surprise. She had her gardening gloves on and a basket in her hand for flowers. These she would have laid down at once, had it been only a walk to the station which was in question; but this was a different affair.

"Yes; why not now?" said her husband with that roll of wealth and comfort in his voice. "We are relations, we need not stand upon ceremony. You mean to call on her some time, I suppose."

"Oh, certainly, I shall call; but not at this hour, Mr. Burton. I have only seen her once. Familiarity would be impertinence in me."

"Pshaw, nonsense! one of your fantastic notions," he said. "I have seen her more than once, and I can't afford to stand on ceremony. Come along. I am going there now."

"Then I think you should go immediately," said Mrs. Burton, looking at her watch, "or you will be too late for the train. Clara, papa will not want us this morning; we can go for some flowers. You will be back by the usual train? I will pick you up at the station, if you like, for I have some calls to make to-day."

"As you please," said her husband; "but I can't understand why you should cross me, Clara, about my cousin. You don't mean to say," he added with a laugh, "that you have any—feeling on the subject? That you are—ever so little—piqued about poor Helen? I shculn't like to use the other word."

Clara Burton looked at her husband very calmly. She was not offended. It was human nature; men were known to possess this kind of vanity, though it was so strange. "I am not at all piqued," she said; "but I like to be civil. I don't suppose Mrs. Drummond and I will be moved to rush into each other's arms all at once, and I don't wish to look as if I paid her less respect because she is poor. If you are going there, you ought to go immediately. You will be late for the train."

"Confound your composure!" Mr. Burton said to himself, as he went down the avenue.

It would have pleased him had his wife been a little discomposed. But, after a while, he took comfort, saying to himself that Clara was a consummate little actress, but that she could not take *him* in. Of course, she was nettled by the presence of his old love, and by his haste to visit her; but she was proud, and would not show it. He felt a double triumph in the sense that these two women were both affected, and endured, for his sweet sake, a certain amount of pain. He set out his chest more than ever, and held up his head. Now was his moment of triumph over the woman who had once rejected him. Had he been able to induce her to come to Dura while she was still

prosperous, the triumph would have been sweeter, for it would have been unmingled with any tinge of regretful or remorseful feeling; but as it was it was sweet. For the first time she would see him in his full importance, in all his state and splendour, she would see him from the depths of her own humiliation, and the force of a contrast greater than he had desired, more complete even than he had dreamed, must already have flashed upon her. Yes, now she would see what she had lost—what a mistake she had made. He meant to be very kind; he would have given her anything she chose to ask for, if she but showed the least sign of penitence, of clearer perception, of being aware of what she had lost. There was nothing which her cousin would not have done for Helen; but he could not resign his own delightful consciousness of triumph. Under this genial influence, he was overflowing with good-nature and kindness.

"What! come out for a little sunshine, old John," he said to the old man at the lodge, who was seated basking in the warmth on the bench at his door. "Good for the rheumatics, ain't it, a day like this? I envy you, old fellow, with nothing to do but sit by your door in the sun and sniff your flowers; you are better off than I am, I can tell you."

"Ay, ay! master, it's fine for me; but you wouldn't think much on't yourself, if you had it," said old John.

Mr. Burton went on laughing and waving his hand, amused with the old man's impudence.

"If I had it myself," he said, with a smile, "I!"—The thought tickled him. It was hard to believe that he himself, a man in the prime of life, growing richer every day, was made of the same clay as old John; and yet of course it was so, he admitted good humouredly. His mind was full of his own benevolence and kind-heartedness as he pursued his way to visit his cousin. What quantities of people were dependent upon his will and pleasure—upon his succour and help! his servants, so many that he could scarcely count them; the clerks in his office; the governess who taught Clara, and who in her turn supported her mother and sisters; and then there was old Stephenson in the village, in his decay, who had once been in Mr. Burton's office; and his old nurse; and the poor Joneses and Robinsons, whose boys he had taken in as errand boys. He ran over this list with such a pleasant sense of his goodness, that his face shone in the morning

sunshine. And at the head of all, first of his pensioners, chief of his dependents—Helen! Mr. Burton laughed half aloud, and furtively rubbed his hands. Yes, yes, by this time there could be no doubt she must have found out her mistake.

Helen had got up that morning with the determination to put grief away from the foreground of her life, and resume such occupations as remained to her. Norah's books had been got out, and her music, and some work—small matters which made a difference in the ghostly drawing-room already, and brought it back to life. Helen was standing by the table arranging some flowers when Mr. Burton came in. Norah had gathered them almost before the dew was off them, and stood by her mother watching her as she grouped them together.

"I wish I could arrange flowers as you do, mamma," Norah was saying admiringly. "How nice it must be to be able to do everything one tries! They will not come right when I do it. You are like the fairy that touched the feathers with her wand, and they all came together as they ought. I wonder how you do it. And you never break anything or spoil anything; but if I only *look* at a vase it breaks."

Norah was saying this with a rueful look when Mr. Burton's smart summons came to the door; and the next minute he had come in, bringing so much air with him into the room, and motion, and sense of importance. Helen put the flowers aside hastily and gave him her hand.

"So you are making use of the garden," he said, taking note of everything with an eye of proprietorship; "quite right, quite right. I hope you will make yourselves quite at home. It is a funny old house, but it is a good style of a place. You need not be ashamed to receive any one here. And I have no doubt you will find everybody very civil, Helen. I have let the people in Dura know you are my cousin. That, though I say it that shouldn't, is a very good passport here."

"I hope you will not take any trouble about us," said Helen hastily. "All I want is to be quiet. I do not care for civilities."

"But you prefer them to incivilities, I hope," said Mr. Burton. "My wife thinks I am wrong to come in this unceremonious way to call. I wanted her to come with me, but she would not. You ladies have your own ways of acting. But I felt that you would be mortified if you saw me pass the door."

"Oh no. I should not have been mortified."

"I will take care you shan't," he said, the roll in his voice sounding more full of protection and benevolence than ever. "I have not much time now. But, my dear Helen, remember that I am always at your service—always. I have mentioned you to all the nicest people. And we hope very soon to see you at the House. I should not have brought you here, I assure you, without intending to be a friend to you in every way. You may rely upon me."

"You are very kind," was all Helen could say.

"I want to be kind. You cannot please me better than by asking me for what you want. Tell me always when your mother wants anything, Norah. There now, I won't say any more; you understand me, Helen. I have a few things in my power, and one of them is to make you comfortable. When you have time to see about you, you will perceive that things have gone very well with me: not that I intend to boast; but Providence, no doubt, has been very kind. My wife will call this afternoon, and should you like a drive or anything, I am sure Clara——"

"Please don't trouble. I would rather be quiet. You forget," said Helen, with a momentary sharpness in her voice, "that Providence, which has been so kind to you, has been hard upon us."

"My dear Helen! You are too good and pious, I am sure, not to know that we ought not to repine."

"I don't think I repine, and I am sure you mean to be kind; but oh! if you would take pity on me, and let me alone——"

It was all she could do to keep from tears. But she would not weep before him. Her jealousy of him and distrust were all coming back. Instinctively she felt the triumph in his voice.

"Poor Helen!" said Mr. Burton, "poor girl! I will not trouble you longer just now. You shall not be bothered. Good-bye; trust to me, and I will take care of you, my poor dear!"

It was ludicrous, it was pitiable; she scorned herself for the impression it made upon her; but how could she help it? She felt that she hated Reginald Burton, as he stood before her in all his wealth and comfort, patronising and soothing her. When he was gone, she rushed up to her room, that Norah might not see her weakness, to weep a few hot, burning tears, and to overcome

the wild, unreasonable anger that swelled in her heart. It was his moment of triumph. Perhaps Helen felt it all the more because, deep down in her heart, she had a consciousness that she too had once triumphed over him, and rejoiced to feel that she could humble him. This was a hard punishment for such an old girlish offence; but still it felt like a punishment, and added a sting to everything he did and said. And whether it was at that moment or at a later period, she herself could not have told, but a sudden gleam came across her of some words which

she had once read somewhere—"Burton and Golden have done it." Whence came these words? had she dreamt them? had she read them somewhere? They came before her as if they had been written upon the wall. Burton and Golden! Was it true? What could it mean?

Mrs. Burton called in the afternoon. She had Clara with her, and what was still more remarkable, young Mr. Rivers, who was staying in the house, but who up to this time had made no mention of the scene he had witnessed. Perhaps it was for lack of



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an opportunity, perhaps because he did not know how far it would be safe to mention Helen—whom he heard spoken of as a relative, yet not with the feeling which moved his own mind when he thought of her. Cyril Rivers was but a big boy, though he began to think himself a man, and Helen had moved him to that sudden fantastic violence of admiration with which an older woman often momentarily inspires a boy. He was eager to go with Mrs. Burton to call. He would walk down with her, he said, and continue his walk after the carriage had picked her up; and in his heart he said to himself that

he must see that woman again. He was full of awe and enthusiasm at the thought of her. She was to him like the heroine of a tragedy, of a story more striking, more affecting than any tragedy he had ever heard of; for this was real, and she was a true woman expressing her natural sentiments, forgiving nothing. It seemed to bring the youth, who was all thrilling with natural romance, within that charmed inner circle of emotion and passion which is, though it is seldom visible, the centre and heart of life.

But Helen bore a very different aspect when she waited to receive Mrs. Burton's

call from that which she bore at the door of St. Mary's Road, confronting Golden. Her flush of colour and glow of energy and vehemence were gone. She was seated, pale and silent, by the table near the window, with her dead white cap encircling her face, and some needlework in her hand. It was not the same Mrs. Drummond, was young Rivers' first disappointed thought. And when she invited the party to sit down, and began to talk about the weather and the country round, he was so bewildered that he longed to steal away. The two ladies sat opposite to each other, and said the sort of things which all ladies say when they call or are called upon. Helen's tone was low, and her voice fell; but these and her black dress were the only things that made it apparent that anything had happened to her. It was only when this little artificial conversation flagged and a pause occurred that the real state of affairs became even slightly visible. The momentary silence fell heavy upon people who had so much on their minds; and while they all sat motionless, the little mirror on the wall made a picture of them in little, which looked like a caricature, full of humorous perception and significance. Mrs. Burton had been hesitating as to what she should say. Helen was a study to her, of which she had as yet made nothing; and perhaps it was as much from curiosity as any other feeling that she at last introduced a subject more interesting than the weather or the landscape. It was after a second pause still more serious than the first.

"It must be very strange to you coming back to Dura after all that has happened. It must be—hard upon you," she said.

"Yes; it is hard." Helen could not trust herself to many words.

"If there is anything in which I can be of use," Mrs. Burton began, "will you let me know? If there is anything that can make it less painful for you. I should be very glad to be of any use."

Mrs. Drummond made no reply; she gave a little bow, and went on with the needle-work she held in her hands, but not as if she cared for that. She was not like what he had thought, but yet young Rivers got up with a certain tremulous awe and approached her. She had not recognised him. She turned her eyes upon him wondering what he could have to do with her. Her heart was steeled to encounter all those words of routine which she knew would have to be said—but who was this boy?

"I think I will go now," he said hastily to Mrs. Burton; and then he lowered his voice.

"May I say just one word? If I can ever do anything to set things right, will you let me know? I shall never forget what you said—on Tuesday."

"On Tuesday?" Helen repeated, in her great surprise looking at him. She ran over Tuesday's proceedings in her mind; at first in vain, and then a little flush came over her face. "Ah," she said, "it was you who came with—Mr. Golden. I remember now."

"But I shall never be with him again," said the youth with energy, which brought the responsive blood to his cheeks. "Of that you may be sure. I am Cyril Rivers. I am not much good now, but I might be—afterwards. Will you remember me? Will you let me serve you if ever I can?"

"Thanks," said Helen, putting out her hand, with a sudden softness in her voice.

The lad was young, romantic, chivalrous. She was to him like some majestic dethroned queen in her sorrow and wronged estate. He stooped down, and touched her white fingers with his lips, and then without looking round, turned, and went away. His impulsive generous words, his fanciful pledge of eagerness to help her went to Helen's heart. She had not expected this, and it surprised and touched her. She was not conscious for a moment of her visitor's steady, investigating glance.

"What a romantic boy!" said Mrs. Burton, with a smile.

"Yes," said Helen, and she called herself back with an effort. "But romance sometimes does one good. It is a surprise at least."

"At that age it does not matter much. I did not know you knew the Riverses," said Mrs. Burton. "This is the eldest son, to be sure; but since the late misfortune they are quite poor. They have not much in their power."

She said this with a charitable motive. It seemed to her as if Helen must mean something by it. Everybody appeared to mean something in the eyes of this philosopher. And she was a little moved by the misfortunes of the woman beside her. She thought it was kind to warn her not to waste her efforts. Helen, on her side, did not know in the least what Mrs. Burton meant; did not suppose she meant anything indeed, and sat patient, accepting this speech with the others as an effort to make conversation, not ungrateful to Mrs. Burton, but wondering when she would go away.

Meanwhile Cyril Rivers hastened out full of emotion. He took the wrong turn in

going out, and before he knew, found himself in the garden, where the two girls were "making acquaintance," as Mrs. Burton had bidden them do. Clara was big and fair, with her father's full form, and a beautiful complexion, the greatest possible contrast to little Norah, with her light figure, and faint rose tints. But Norah at this moment was flushed and angry, looking as her mother had done that memorable evening at St. Mary's Road.

"Oh, do come here, Mr. Rivers," said Clara, "Norah is so cross. I only said what papa says so often—that it would be wretched to live in the country without a carriage or a pony or anything. Don't you think so too?"

Norah flushed more deeply than ever. "I am not cross. We did not come to live in the country for pleasure, and what does it matter to us about carriages and ponies? We are poor."

"And so am I," said the boy, with that instinctive adoption of "our side" which Norah had attributed to him. He thought how pretty she was as she lifted her brown eyes. What a pretty child! and he was approaching twenty, a man, and his heart yearned over the helpless and sorrowful. "I shall have to sell my horses and go afoot; but I don't think I shall be wretched. Everybody cannot be rich like Mr. Burton, you know."

"But you are always Lord Rivers's son," said Clara. "You can have what you like everywhere. I think it is very cross of Norah not to care."

And Mr. Burton's daughter, foiled in her first attempt to secure her own cousin's envy and admiration, looked as if she would like to cry. Young Rivers laughed as he went away at her discomfiture. As he turned to find the right way of exit, he looked back upon them with an unconscious comparison. He did not know or think what was Norah Drummond's descent. He took her unconsciously as the type of a higher class impoverished but not fallen, beside that small representative of the *nouveaux riches*. And all his sympathies were on the side of the former. He pulled a little white rosebud from a tree as he passed, and put it in his coat with a meaning which was partly real and partly fantastic. They were poor, they were injured, and wronged, and in trouble. He put their colours, as it were, in his helmet. Foolish boy, full of romance and nonsense! one day or other in their cause he felt he might couch his lance.

CHAPTER XX.

THE next day after Mrs. Burton's carriage had been seen at Helen's door a great many

people called on Mrs. Drummond—all "the nicest people"—some who had known her or known about her in the old days, some who came because she was Mr. Burton's cousin, and some who took that means of showing their sympathy. The door was besieged; and Susan, half flattered by the importance of her position, half-alarmed lest this might be a commencement of the system of putting upon which she dreaded, brought in the cards, gingerly holding them in a hand which she had wrapped up in her apron, and giving a little sketch of the persons represented. There was the doctor's wife, and the major's lady, and Mrs. Ashurst from the Row, and "them London folks," all of whom were sensible enough to make their advances solely in this way. Mrs. Dalton was the only person admitted. Helen was too well brought up, she had too much sense of the proprieties of her position, to shut her door against the clergyman's wife—who brought her husband's card, and explained that he would have come too but for the fear of intruding too early.

"But I hope you will let us see you," the kind woman added. "We are such near neighbours. My eldest little girl is the same age as yours. I think we should understand each other. And I have such a busy life—to be able to run across and talk things over now and then would be such a comfort to me."

"You mean it would be a comfort to me," said Helen, "the sight of a kind face."

"And Norah will come and see my Mary. They can take their walks together, and amuse each other. It is such a pleasure to me," said Mrs. Dalton, "to look across at these windows, and think that you are here." She had said so much with the amiable power of make-believe, not exactly deception, which an affectionate temper and her position as clergy-woman made natural to her—when she caught Helen's eye, and nature suddenly had the mastery. "Oh, Mrs. Drummond, how I babble! I am so sorry, so sorry!" she said, and her eyes ran over with tears, though Helen did not weep. It is not easy to repel such a visitor. They grew friends at that first interview, while Norah stood by and made her observations too.

"May I go and see Mary?" she asked, when Mrs. Dalton had gone. "I think I shall like her better than Clara Burton. How funny it must be to have so many brothers and sisters, mamma; and I who never had either a brother or a sister! I should like to have had just one—a little sister with blue eyes. But, then, if you had been very fond of her, fonder than of me, I should not have

liked that. Perhaps, on the whole, a brother would have been the best. A boy is a change—they are useless, and yet they are nice—for a long walk for instance. I wish I had had a big brother, older than me—quite old—almost grown up. How funny it would have been! I wonder what we should have called him. If he had been as big as—Mr. Rivers, for instance—that would have been nice for you too.”

Helen smiled, and let the child run on. It was the music to which her life was set. Norah's monologue accompanied everything. Sometimes, indeed, an answer was necessary, which interrupted the strain, but generally a word, a smile, or a monosyllable was enough. She went on weaving her big brother out of her imagination; it was more delightful than speculating about Mary Dalton.

“I am sure it would have been nice for you too,” she said. “He would have given you his arm when you were tired, and looked after the luggage, and locked all the doors at nights. The only thing is, it would have been a great expense. When people are poor, I suppose they can't afford to have boys. They want so many things. But yet he would have been nice all the same. I hope he would have had a pretty name; not so short as Ned, and not so common as Charlie. Charlie is the eldest of the Daltons—such a big boy. Oh, I wonder what our boy's name would have been? Do you like Oswald, mamma, or Eustace? Eustace sounds like a priest or something dreadfully wise. I don't like solemn boys. So long as he was big and strong, and not too clever. But oh, dear, dear, what is the use of talking? We never can have a big boy, I suppose? I must be content with other girls' brothers. I shall never have one of my very own.”

“The less you have to do with other girls' brothers the better, Norah,” said Helen, bequiled into a smile.

“I do not care for them, I am sure,” said Norah, with dignity; “though I don't dislike gentlemen, mamma—quite old gentlemen, like Dr. Maurice and Mr. Haldane, are very nice. And I should like to have had—Mr. Rivers, for instance—for a big brother. I rather think, too, I like Ned Burton better than Clara. It is more natural to hear a boy talk of ponies and things. She never thinks of anything else—dogs, and horses, and carriages, and the fine things she has. It is not polite to talk of such things to people who have not got them. I told her I did not care for ponies, nor grapes, nor hot-house flowers; and that I would rather live in

London than at the House. And, oh, so many—stories, mamma! Is it wrong to tell a little fib when you don't mean any harm? Just a little one, when people boast and make themselves disagreeable—and when you don't mean any harm?”

“It is always wrong to tell fibs; and I don't know the difference between big ones and little ones,” said Helen.

“Oh, mamma, but I do! A big story is—for instance. If I were to say Susan had stolen your watch, that would be a wicked lie. But when I say I don't care for grapes, and would not like to have a pony, it isn't quite true, but then it makes Clara be quiet, and does nobody any harm. I am sure there is a great difference. It would be very nice to have a pony, you know. Only think, mamma, to go cantering away across the common and on the turf! But I would not give in to say that I should like to be Clara, or that she was better off than me!”

Norah's casuistry silenced her mother. She shook her head, but she did not say anything. Something of the same feeling was, indeed, in her own mind. She, too, would have liked to be contemptuous of the luxuries which her neighbours dangled before her eyes. And Norah resumed her monologue. The mother only partially heard it, waking up now and then to give the necessary response, but carrying on all the time her own separate thread of cogitation, which would not shape itself into words. The old parlour, with its brown-grey curtains and all its spindle-legged furniture, enclosed and seemed to watch the human creatures who disturbed the silence. A room which has been long unoccupied, and which is too large for its new inhabitants, has often this spectator look. The pictures looked down from the walls and watched; up in the little round mirror two people in a miniature interior, who were in reality reflections of the two below, but looked quite different, glanced down upon them, and watched also. The sky looked in through the five windows, and the lime-trees in front kept tapping with their branches against the panes to show that they were looking on. All the rest were clandestine, but the lime-trees were honest in their scrutiny. And in the midst of it the mother and daughter led their subdued lives. Norah's voice ran through all like a brook or a bird. Helen was mostly silent, saying little. They had a roof to shelter them, enough of daily bread, the kindness of strangers outside, the rude but sympathetic kindness of Susan within. This was more, a great deal more, than often falls to the lot of human wrecks

after a great shipwreck. Norah after a little while accepted it as the natural rule of life, and forgot every other; and Helen was silent, though she did not forget. The silence of the house, however, by times oppressed the child. She lay awake in the great bedroom up-stairs, afraid to go to sleep till her mother should come; and even in the daylight there were moments when Norah was afraid of the ghostly drawing-room, and could not but feel that weird aged women, the Miss Pagets, whom her mother had known, or some of the old Harcourts were watching her from behind the doors, or from the shade of the curtains. There was a deep china closet beside the fireplace with one particular knot in the wood-work which fascinated Norah, and made her feel that some mysterious eye was gazing at her from within. But all these fancies dispersed the moment Mrs. Drummond appeared. There was protection in the soft rustle of her gown, the distant sound of her voice. And so the routine of life—a new routine, but soon firmly established, supporting them as upon props of use and wont, began again. There were the lessons in the morning, and Norah's music, and a long walk in the afternoon; and they went to bed early, glad to be done with life and another day. Or at least Helen was glad to be done with it—not Norah, to whom it was the opening of the story, and to whom once more the sunshine began to look as sweet as ever, and each new morning was a delight.

A few weeks after their arrival the Haldanes followed them. Miss Jane had written beforehand begging for information about the house and the journey; and it was only then that Helen learned, with a mortification she could scarcely overcome, that the Gatehouse was to be their refuge too. This fact so changed the character of her cousin's kindness to her, that her pride was with difficulty subdued to silence; but she had sufficient self-control to say nothing—pride itself coming to her aid.

"Perhaps you would be so good as to send me a line with a few particulars," Miss Jane wrote. "I should like to know for myself and mother if there is a good minister of our denomination, and if you would mention the price of meat, and how much you are giving for the best butter, I should be very much obliged. I should like to know if there is a good room on the ground-floor that would do for Stephen, and if we could have a Bath-chair to bring him down from the station, for I am very distrustful of cabs. Also about a charwoman, which is very im-

portant. I am active myself and always look after the washing, so that one strong handy woman to come from six in the morning till two would do all I should require."

Mrs. Drummond made an effort and answered all these questions, and even walked to the station to see them arrive. It was a mournful sight enough. She stood and looked on with her heart aching, and saw the man whom she had known so different lifted out of the carriage and put into the invalid chair. She saw the look of dumb anguish and humiliation in his eyes which showed how he felt this public exposure of his weakness. He was very patient; he smiled and thanked the people who moved him: yet Helen, with her perceptions quickened by her own suffering, felt the intolerable pain in the other's soul, and went away hurriedly, not to afflict him further by her presence. What had he done? How had this man sinned more than others? All the idlers that lounged about and watched him, were they better or dearer to God than he was? Mrs. Drummond was half a Pagan, though she did not know it. She hurried away with a miserable sense that it was past bearing. But Stephen set his lips tight and bore it. He bore the looks of the village people who came out to their doors to look at him as he passed. As for his mother and sister they scarcely remarked his silence. They were so happy that everything had gone off so well, that he had borne it so easily.

"I don't think he looks a bit the worse," said Miss Jane.

They were the tenderest, the most patient of nurses, but they had accepted his illness long ago as a matter of course. From the moment he was placed in the chair, and so off their mind, as it were, the luggage came into the ascendant and took his place. They had a wonderful amount of parcels, mostly done up in brown paper. Mrs. Haldane herself carried her pet canary in its cage, tied up in a blue-and-white handkerchief. She was more anxious about this for the moment than about her son. The procession was one which caught everybody's eye. First two wheel-barrow with the luggage, the first of which was occupied by Stephen's bed and chair, the other piled up with boxes, among the rest two portmanteaus of his own, on which he could still read, on old labels which he had preserved with pride, the names of Naples, Florence, and Rome. Had he been actually there, he who was now little more than a piece of luggage himself? Miss Jane

divided her attentions between her brother and the second wheel-barrow, on which the brown-paper parcels were tumbling and nodding, ready to fall. His mother walked on the other side, holding fast by the parcel in the blue-and-white handkerchief. Mrs. Burton, who was passing in her carriage, stopped to look after them. She, too, had known Stephen in better days. She did not ask passionate questions as Helen was doing; but she felt the shock in her way, and only comforted herself by thinking that the feelings get blunted in such unfortunate cases, and that no doubt other people felt more for him than he felt for himself.

But notwithstanding the callousness which use had brought, there was no indifference to Stephen's comfort in the minds of his attendants. Everything was arranged for him that evening as if he had been surrounded by a crowd of servants. When Helen went to see him he was seated by the window with flowers upon his table and all his papers arranged upon it. The flowers were not very choice; they were of Miss Jane's selection, and marigolds and plummy variegated grass looked beautiful in her eyes. Yet nothing but love could have put everything in its place so soon, and metamorphosed all at once the dining-room of the Gatehouse into Stephen's room, where everything bore a reference to him and was arranged for his special comfort. Perhaps they did not always feel for him, or even see what room there was for feeling. But this they could do—and in it they never failed.

"Does not he look comfortable?" Miss Jane said with triumph. "You would think to see him he had never budged from his chair. And he got through the journey very well. If you but knew how frightened I was when we set out!"

Stephen looked at Mrs. Drummond with a smile. There were some lines about his mouth and a quiver in his upper lip which spoke to her more clearly than to his sister. Helen had not been in the way of going out of herself to sympathise with others; and it seemed to her as if she had suddenly got a new pair of eyes, an additional sense. While they were all talking she saw what the journey had really cost him in his smile.

"It is strange to see the world again after so long," he said, "and to realise that once one walked about it quite carelessly like other people, without thinking what a thing it was."

"But, Stephen, I am sure you don't re-pine," said his mother, "you know whose

will it is, and you would not have it different? That is such a comfort whatever we may have to suffer."

"You would not have it different!"

Helen looked at him almost with tears in her eyes.

"That is a great deal to say, mother," he answered with a suppressed sigh; while she still went on asking herself passionately what had he done? what had he done?

"I think the charwoman will suit very well," said Miss Jane. "She seems clean, and that is the great thing. I am very well satisfied with everything I have seen as yet. The kitchen garden is beautiful. I suppose as there is no division, we are to have it between us—that and the fruit? I have been thinking a few fowls would be very nice if you have no objection. They cost little to keep, and to have your own eggs is a great luxury. And meat seems reasonable. I am very well satisfied with all I have seen."

"If we only knew about the chapel," said Mrs. Haldane. "So much of your comfort depends on your minister. If he is a nice man he will be company for Stephen. That is what I am most afraid of—that he will be dull in the country. There was always some one coming in about the magazine or some society or other when we were in town. I am afraid, Stephen, you will feel quite lost here."

"Not for want of the visitors, mother," he said; "especially if Mrs. Drummond will spare me Norah. She is better than any minister—not meaning any slight to my brethren," he added, in a half apologetic, half-laughing tone. He could laugh still, which was a thing Helen found it very difficult to understand.

"Norah is very nice, and I like dearly to see her," said his mother; "but, Stephen, I don't like to hear you talk like that. Mrs. Drummond is not to know that it is all your nonsense. You were always such a one for a joke."

"My jokes have not been very brilliant lately," he said, with a smile. Mrs. Haldane rose at that moment to help her daughter with something she was moving to the other end of the room, and Stephen, seizing the opportunity, turned quickly round upon Helen, who was sitting by him. "You are very sorry for me," he said, with a mixture of gratitude and impatience. "Don't! it is better not!"

"How can I help it?" cried Helen. "And why is it better not?"

"Because I cannot bear it," he said, almost sternly.

This passed in a moment, while the unconscious women at the other end had altered the position of a table. Never man had more tender nurses than these two; but they had ceased to be sorry for him in look or word. They had accepted their own fate and his; his helplessness was to them like the daylight or the dark, a thing inevitable, the course of nature; and the matter-of-fact way in which they had learned to treat it made his life supportable. But it was difficult for a stranger to realise such a fact.

"I never told you that we were disappointed about letting the house," said Miss Jane. "A great many people came, but no one who was satisfactory. It is a great loss. I have left a person in it to try for a few months longer. People are very unprincipled, coming out of mere curiosity, and turning over your blankets and counterpanes without a thought."

Here the conversation came to a pause, and Helen rose. She was standing saying her farewells and making such offers of assistance as she could, when the daily event with which she had grown familiar took place.

"There is some one coming," said Stephen, from the window. "It ought to be the queen by the commotion it makes: but it is only Burton."

And Mrs. Haldane and Miss Jane both rushed forward to see. Helen withdrew out of sight with a secret bitterness which she could not have put into words. Mr. Burton was driving home from the station in all his usual importance. His horses were groomed to perfection, the mountings of his harness sparkled in the sun. He half drew up as he passed, making his bays prance and express their disapprobation, while he took off his hat to the new arrivals. It was such a salutation as a jocund monarch might have tossed at a humble worshipper, mock ceremony and conscious condescension. The women looking out never thought of that. They ran from one window to another to watch him entering the avenue, they talked to each other of his fine horses, the neat groom beside him, and how polite he was. Stephen had been looking on, too, with keen interest. A smile was on his face, but the lines above his eyes were contracted, and the eyes themselves gleamed with a sudden fire which startled Helen.

"I wonder what he thinks of it all," he

said to her under his breath, "if he thinks at all. I wonder if he is comfortable when he reflects who are living at his gates?"

The words were said so low that she had to stoop to hear; and with a wondering thrill of half-comprehension she looked at him. What did he mean? From whence came that tone which was almost fierce in its self-restraint? It seemed to kindle a smouldering fire in her, of the nature of which she was not quite aware. "Burton and Golden" suddenly flashed across her thoughts again. Where was it she had seen the names linked together? What did it mean? and what did Stephen mean? She felt as if she had almost found out something, which quickened her pulse and made her heart beat—almost. But the last point of enlightenment was yet to come.

"Now he has turned in at the gate," said Miss Jane. "Well, for my part, I am glad to have seen him; and to think that a man could do all that by his own exertions! If he had been a nobleman I should not have thought half so much of it. I suppose, now, that could not be seen anywhere but in England? You may smile, Stephen, and think me very vulgar-minded; but I do think it is a very wonderful sight."

And thus the second household settled down, and became a part of the landscape which the family at Dura surveyed with complaisant proprietorship, and through which Mr. Burton drove every afternoon, calling admiring spectators to all the windows. The rich man had never enjoyed the commotion he made so much as he did now when he could see at the Gatehouse those faces looking out. There was scarcely an evening but Miss Jane or her mother would stand up to see him, gazing with unconscious worship at this representative of wealth and strength, and that practical power which sways the world; while Norah would clamber up on a chair behind the blinds at the other end, and look out with her big brown eyes full of serious observation. He thought Norah wondered and worshipped too, not being able to understand the language of her eyes. And sometimes he would see, or think he saw, her mother behind her. When he did so he went home in high good-humour, and was more jocular than usual; for nothing gave him such a sense of his own greatness, his prosperity, and superiority to common flesh and blood, as the homage, or supposed homage paid to him by those lookers-on at the windows of the Gatehouse.

Mr. Burton's satisfaction came to a climax

when his father-in-law came to pay his next visit, which happened not very long after the arrival of the Haldanes. Mr. Baldwin, as we have said, was a Dissenter, and something like a lay bishop in his denomination. He was very rich, and lived very plainly at Clapham with his two sisters, Mrs. Everett and Miss Louisa. They were all very good people in their way. There was not a man in England who subscribed to more societies or presided at a greater number of meetings. He spent half his income in this way; he "promoted" charities as his son-in-law promoted joint-stock companies; and prided himself on the simplicity of his living and his tastes, notwithstanding his wealth. When he and his sisters came to pay a visit at Dura they walked from the station, leaving their servants and their boxes to follow in a fly. "We have the use of our limbs, I am thankful to Providence," one of the sisters would say; "why should we have a carriage for a little bit of road like that?" They walked in a little procession, the gentleman in advance, like a triumphant cock in front of his harem, the two ladies a little behind. Mr. Baldwin wore his hat on the back of his head, and a white tie, like one of his favourite ministers; he had a round, chubby face, without any whiskers, and a complexion almost as clear as little Clara's. The two ladies were like him, except that Mrs. Everett, who was a widow, was large and stout, and Miss Louisa pale and thin. They walked along with a natural feeling of benevolent supremacy, making their remarks on everybody and everything with distinct voices. When they got to the Gatehouse they paused and inspected it, though the windows were all open.

"I think Reginald was wrong to give such a house as this to those poor people," said the married sister in front of the door. "It is a handsome house. He might have found some little cottage for them, and let this to a family."

"But, Martha, he gave what he had, and it is that that is always accepted," said Miss Louisa.

The brother drowned her plaintive little voice with a more decided reply—

"I am very glad Haldane has such good quarters. As for the lady, I suppose she was not to blame; but when a man flies in the face of Providence I would not reward him by providing for his wife and family. I agree with Martha. It is a waste of the gifts of God to give this house to poor people who cannot enjoy it; but still Burton

is right on the whole. If you cannot do better with your property, why should not you use it to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness? I approve of his charity on the whole."

Inside the recipients of the charity sat and heard all through the open windows. But what then? Mr. Baldwin and his sisters were not responsible for that. They went on to the avenue making the same candid and audible remarks all along the road. It was not necessary that they should exercise self-restraint. They were in the dominions of their relation. They were absolute over all foolish sentiment and false pride. They said it loud out, frankly, whatever they might have to say. The arrival of these visitors always made a certain commotion at Dura. It moved Mr. Burton a great deal more than it did his wife. Indeed, if there was anything which vexed him in her exemplary behaviour, it was that she would not make temporarily the changes which he thought were "only respectful" to suit the tastes of her father and aunts. "You know your father likes only plain roast and boiled," he would say to her, half-indignantly, adding, with a laugh, "and minister sauce." This last was one of his favourite jokes, though it did not strike his wife as particularly brilliant. But the minister sauce was the only thing which Mrs. Burton provided for her father. She held fast by her *menu*, though he disapproved of it. She dressed herself tranquilly for dinner, though her aunts held up their hands, and asked her solemnly if she knew what all this extravagance must come to? In these matters Clara would not give way; but she asked the minister of the chapel in the village to dinner, and it was in presence of this functionary that Mr. Baldwin filled up the measure of his son-in-law's content.

"I see you have been very generous to poor Haldane," he said. "I am very much obliged to you, Burton. He is my own man; I should have been compelled to do something for him if you had not taken him up; and my hands are always so full! You will find I do not forget it. But it was a great waste to put him into such a handsome house."

"I am delighted to have pleased you," said Mr. Burton. "It was an empty house; and I have put my cousin, Mrs. Drummond, in the other end, whom I was obliged to take care of. It was the cheapest way of doing it. I am most happy to think I have relieved you, even of so little as that."

"Oh yes, you have relieved me," said

Mr. Baldwin. "I shan't forget it. It will be an encouragement to Mr. Truston and to many of the brethren to see that a sick friend is never abandoned. I don't mean to say that you want any inducement—but, still, when you can see that even in the case of failing strength——"

"Oh yes. I am sure it is most encouraging," the poor minister faltered.

Encouraging to think of Stephen Haldane, who was thus provided for! The two rich men went on with their talk over their wine, while some confused speculation as to the ways of Providence went through the head of their companion. He was young, and he felt ill-at-ease, and he did not like to interfere much. Had it been Mr. Dalton he would have been less easily silenced. Thus Mr. Burton found his benevolence in one particular at least attended with the most perfect success.

CHAPTER XXI.

AND everything settled down, and Nature resumed her common round. This is what Nature does in all circumstances. There never was so bad a storm but next morning the thrifty mother took heart and set to work again as best she could to make amends for it. It is only when the storm affects human hearts and lives that this cheerful, pathetic effort to get the better of it becomes terrible; for the mending in such cases is so often but superficial, the cure impossible. Other trees grow up to fill the gap made by the one blown down; but not other loves or other hopes. Yet gradually the tempest calms, the wreck is swept away, and some things that are new are always better than some things that were old, even though the old can never be replaced while life goes on.

Of all the dwellers in the Gatehouse, it was poor Haldane who felt this the most. The reality of this life in the country was very different from the anticipation. The fresh air which his mother had hoped to have for Stephen—the cottage garden which they had all dreamt of (even he himself by moments), where he could be wheeled in his chair to sit under the apple-tree and smell the flowers—had vanished from their list of possibilities. All the fresh air he could have was from the open window by which his chair was placed. But not even the garden and the apple-tree would have done so much for him as the varieties of the country road. Instead of the garden walls at Victoria Villas the strip of dusty grass,

the chance sight of a neighbour's child at play, or (more likely) of a neighbour's clothes hung out to dry, he had a genuine rural high-road, with all its sights. He saw the carts passing with rural produce, full of big baskets of vegetables for the London market; he saw the great waggons of odorous hay, with a man asleep on the top, half buried in the warm and fragrant mass, or cracking his whip on the path, and shouting drowsy, inarticulate calls to the horses, who took their own way, and did not mind him; he saw the carriages gleam past with the great people, whom by degrees he got to know; and then the Rectory children were always about, and Mrs. Dalton in her pony-chaise, and the people coming and going from the village. There were two of the village folk in particular who brought a positive pleasure into his life—not a pair of lovers, or any pretty group, but only Clippings, the tailor, and Brown, the shoemaker, who strolled down the road in the evening to smoke their pipes and talk politics as far as the Rectory gate. Clippings, who lived "up town," was always decorous in his shabby coat; but Brown, whose shop was "at the corner," came in his shirtsleeves, with his apron turned up obliquely to one side. They would stop just opposite his window when they got hot in their discussion. Sometimes it was the parish they talked of, sometimes the affairs of the state, and it was in Stephen's mind sometimes to invite them to cross the road, and to have his say in the matter. They were not men of education or intelligence perhaps; but they *were* men, living the natural human life from which he had been torn, and it did him good to watch them. After a while they began to look over at him and take off their hats, half with village obsequiousness to a possible customer, half with natural feeling for a soul in prison; and he gave them a nod in return.

But this vulgar fancy of his was not quite approved of within. "If you are so friendly with these men, Stephen, you will have them coming over, and poisoning the whole house with tobacco," Mrs. Haldane said, with an expressive sniff. "I think I smell it even now." But his mother was not aware that the scent of the tobacco was like an air of paradise to poor Stephen, who had loved it well enough when he was his own master, though it had become impossible now.

Mrs. Haldane, however, did not say a word against Mr. Dalton's cigar, which he very often smoked under Stephen's window in those summer mornings, lounging across

in his study coat. It must be remembered that Stephen was not a Dissenting minister *pur et simple*, but a man whose name had been heard in the literary world, especially in that literary world which Mr. Dalton, as a "thoughtful" and "liberal" clergyman, chiefly affected. The rector felt that it was kind to go and talk to poor Haldane, but he was not so overwhelmingly superior as he might have been under other circumstances. He did not set him down at once at a distance of a hundred miles, as he did Mr. Truston, the minister of the chapel at Dura, by the mere suavity of his "good morning." On the contrary, they had a great deal of talk. Mr. Dalton was a man who piqued himself on his Radicalism, except when he happened to come in contact with Radicals, and he was very great in education, though he left the parish schools chiefly to his wife. When anything had happened which was more than ordinarily interesting in public affairs, he would stride across with gaiety to the encounter: "I told you your friend Bright was not liberal-minded enough to see that distinction," he would say; or, "Gladstone has gone off on another search after truth;" and then the battle would go on, while Stephen sat inside and his interlocutor paced the white flags in front of the Gatehouse up and down under the windows with that fragrant cigar. Sometimes Mary would come flying over from the Rectory: "Papa, papa, you are wanted. There are some papers to sign, and mamma can't do it, she says." "*Pazienza!*" the rector would answer, for he had travelled too.

And then on the Saturday there were other diversions for Stephen. Old Ann from the farm of Dura Den would whip up her old white pony and stop her cart under his window. She had her grandson with her, a chubby lad of twelve, in a smock-frock, beautifully worked about the shoulders, with cheeks as red as the big poppies in the nosegay which his grandmother made a point of bringing every Saturday to the poor sick gentleman.

"And how do you do, sir, this fine fresh morning?" she would shout to him. "I hope as I sees you better. Sammy, give me the flowers. It's old-fashioned, master, but it's sweet; and I just wish I see you able to come and fetch 'em for yourself."

"Thank you, Ann; but I fear that's past hoping for," Stephen would say with a smile.

The same colloquy passed between them every week, but they did not tire of it, and the little cart with its mixture of colours,

the red carrots, and white cauliflowers, and many-tinted greens, was a pleasant sight to him. He did not object even to the pungent odour of the celery, which often communicated itself to his bouquet. The white pony, and the red and white and green of the vegetables, and old Ann with a small face, like a russet winter apple, under her deep bonnet, and her little red shawl, trimly tied in round her waist by the great, many-pocketed apron; and Sammy trudging behind, with boots like buckets, with a basket of crimson cabbage for pickles on his arm, and his puffy, peony cheeks, made up a homely picture which delighted the recluse. It was an event for him when the Saturday came round, and he began (he said) to be fond of the smell of celery, and to think double poppies very handsome, showy flowers to put into a nosegay. Miss Jane took an interest in Ann too, but it was of a different kind. She would go out to the door, and have long discussions with her on various subjects, quite as interesting as the rector's battles with Stephen—whether the butter was rising, and what was the cheapest for her poultry; for Ann's butter and her poultry were the best in Dura, and when she knew you, and felt that you were to be depended upon, she was not dear, Miss Jane always said.

There was also another visitor, who came once a week, not to Stephen's window, but to make a call in all proper state. This was Mr. Truston, the minister of the chapel, who was like Stephen, a *protégé* of Mr. Baldwin, but had not either done so much credit or given so much trouble to the denomination as Haldane had. Mr. Truston was aware how his new acquaintance was spoken of by the community, and his mind was much divided between veneration for Stephen's powers and a desire to be faithful with his brother. If he could be the humble instrument of setting him quite right with the denomination and preserving the efficiency of the magazine, he felt that he would not have lived in vain. But it was a dreadful trial to his modesty to assume an admonitory position to one whom he respected so much. He confided his difficulties to Mrs. Wigginton, the wife of the draper at Dura, who was a leading member of the congregation, and a very thoughtful woman; and she had given him a great deal of encouragement, and put his duty before him in the clearest light.

"The thing is to keep him to fundamental principles," Mrs. Wigginton said. "I would excuse a great deal if he preserved these. We may be superior to distinctions, and know

that there is good both in church and chapel. But that will not do for the common mass. And we must support the denomination, Mr. Truston. It has its faults—but, whatever its faults may be, we must stand by our flag."

"Ah, I wish you would take him in hand," said the minister with a sigh; but, all the same, such inspiration as this did not go for nothing. He began to call on the Haldanes every week; and when he had screwed up his courage he meant to be very faithful with Stephen; but a man cannot begin that process all at once.

Thus the Haldanes settled down in the Gatehouse; and their settling down affected Helen with that unintentional example and encouragement, which people convey to each other without meaning it. They were all very poor, but Miss Jane, who had never been very rich, and who had been trained to live on the smallest sum imaginable, made no hardship of her poverty, and communicated a certain cheerfulness about it even to her neighbour, whose mind and training were so very different. Miss Jane took it as she had learned to take (though not till after many struggles) her brother's illness, as a matter of course. She was aware that there were rich people in the world. She saw them even, the Burtons, for instance, who passed her every day, and whose life was full of luxury; but this did not move her, any more than the sight of a great beauty would have moved her to impatience of her own plain and homely face. The wealth, like the beauty, was exceptional. The homeliness and the poverty were the natural rule. And Helen saw that the lines of pain were softened in Stephen's face, and that he had begun to feel something like pleasure in those alleviations of his loneliness which have been described. All this produced a soothing, quieting influence upon her. She was hushed, as a child is who is not satisfied, whose cry is ready to burst forth at any moment, but upon whom the very atmosphere, the stillness of the air has produced a certain calm. The wrong which had burnt her heart like a fire was not extinguished; it burned low, not for want of fuel, but because the air was soft and humid, and kept down the flame. And she herself was subdued. She was weary of suffering, and the routine of the new life acted upon her like an opiate, and the sense that all this was accepted as ordinary and natural by others, kept her down. And then Norah had cast away those bonds which oppress a child—the bonds of conventional quiet, which remain when natural grief has passed away in the order of things. Norah

had begun to sing about the house, to dance when she should have walked, to wake up like the flowers, to live like the birds, spending her days in a chatter and flutter of life and gladness. All this calmed down and suppressed the feelings which had swayed Helen after her husband's death. Though her old sense of suspicion in respect to her cousin had succeeded the momentary relenting which his kindness had produced in her, even that was suppressed in the artificial calm. She blamed herself for shrinking from his presence, for disliking his friendliness; she even made an effort to go to his house, to overcome what she said to herself was her mean envy of his prosperity. She made friends with his wife, as far as two women so different could make friends, and tried to believe that Reginald Burton himself had never meant but well. It was in October, when she had first begun fully to realise the strange quietness that had come upon her, that it was suddenly broken up, never in that same fashion to return again.

There were visitors at the time at Dura House, visitors of importance, great county people, potentates whom it was said, Mrs. Burton was specially bent on conciliating in order to open the way into Parliament—a glory upon which her heart was set—to her husband. Mr. Burton had himself taken a holiday from business, and, on this particular day had gone up, after a long interval, "to see," he said, with that cheerful, important laugh of his, "how things were going on." That evening, however, Dura village was disappointed of its usual amusement. The phaeton with the bays went slowly past, driven by the groom, with a certain consternation in every line of the horses, and in every splendid tail and high-stepping hoof.

"Has not your master come?" Mrs. Burton asked, when she met this forlorn equipage in the avenue. Such a thing had been known; sometimes business was so urgent that Mr. Burton had lost his train, or waited for one that went later. But that which had happened this evening had never happened before.

"He is walking, ma'm," said the groom, with gloomy signification. It gave even Mrs. Burton a start, though she was usually so self-possessed; and as for the groom, he spread it about through the house that there had been "a smash" in the City. Nothing else could account for so extraordinary a step.

Mr. Burton walked, and his countenance was clouded. There was a shade on it, which the people about Dura, stupefied in the first instance, by seeing him afoot

at that hour, interpreted as the groom did. They thought "something must have happened." The Bank of England must have faltered on its throne; half the merchants, at home and abroad, must have fallen to the dust, like Dagon. Some one of weak mind, who suggested that the ministry might be out, was snubbed by everybody with a contempt proportioned to his foolishness. Would Mr. Burton look like that for any merely political misfortune? But no one ventured even to suggest that Burton & Co. themselves might have sustained some blow. Such treason might be in men's thoughts, but no one dared to hint at an event which more than a revolution or a lost empire would have convulsed Dura. There are some things which it is impious even to speculate about.

Mr. Burton went direct to the Gatehouse. He had not his usual condescending word to Susan, nor did he remember to wave his hand to Stephen as he passed the window. He went straight into the drawing-room, where Helen and Norah were sitting. They had just come in from their walk, and were going to have tea; and such a visit at this hour startled them. There was something more than gloom on his face; there was suppressed anger, and he had the look of a man who had come to speak his mind. He shook hands in the slightest, most hasty way, not caring evidently to waste time in salutations, and he did not take the chair that was offered to him. He kept standing, looking first at Helen and then at Norah, with glances which he seemed to expect would be understood; but as Norah had been present at every discussion in the house all her life, it did not occur to her to go away, nor to her mother to send her. At last he was obliged to speak plainly.

"I am anxious to talk to you by yourself," he said. "I have something very important to say. Norah, perhaps, would run out to the garden, or somewhere—for half an hour, I should not ask for more."

"Norah!" said Helen, with surprise. "But she has heard everything that any one can have to say to me. She knows as much as I do. You may say anything before Norah."

"By ——!" said Mr. Burton. He did not put any word in the vacant place. He swore by Blank, as we do in books, contenting himself with the "By——!" "I don't mean to speak of my affairs before Norah," he said, walking to the window and looking out. "Send her away."

He waited there with his back turned to the two, who gazed at each other amazed.

"Go up-stairs till I send for you, Norah," said Helen, with a trembling voice. It must be some new pain, some new terror, something about Norah's father. She put her hand on her heart to keep it still. This was how her calm was broken all in a moment. She put her child away with the other hand. And Norah, astonished, indignant, choking with sudden rage and mortification, flew out of the room and rushed up-stairs. The sound of her hurried, angry retreat seemed to ring through all the house. And it was not till her foot was heard overhead that her mother found breath to speak. "What is it?—tell me! There can be nothing now so very hard to bear."

"I don't know what you mean about hard to bear," said Mr. Burton, turning pettishly round and seating himself on a chair in front of her. "Helen, I have done all I could to be kind to you. You will say it has not cost me very much, but it has cost me more than you think. I have put myself to a great deal of trouble, and——"

"Is this all you have to tell me?" she asked faintly, still holding her hand upon her heart.

"All!" he repeated; and then, changing his tone suddenly, "do you know anything about this new folly Maurice has taken in hand? Don't prevaricate, Helen; answer me yes or no."

"I do not know what you mean," she said, and paused for breath. Her fright, and the strange assault that had been made upon her, confused her mind. Then gradually with Maurice's name came a sudden gleam of light.

"That is a pretence," he said. "I can see in your face that you understand. You that I have been, so to speak, nourishing in my bosom—you—Helen! There is still time to think better of it. Have you given your consent to it? Has he got your name?"

"If it is anything Dr. Maurice is doing," she said, "yes, he has got my consent, and more than my consent."

"Good heavens, why? Are you in your senses? I thought it was some idiotic woman's notion. What good can it possibly do to rake up that business all over again? What the deuce do you mean by it? What can it ever be to you?"

"What is it to you?" she said.

"To me!" She was looking at him, and his voice fell. He had begun loudly, as if with the intention of declaring that to him it was less than nothing; but he was caught by her look, and only grew confused, and stammered out again, "To me!"



See page 84.

"Yes," said Helen. "You are not a Director. You have said you were a loser only, you had no responsibility. Then what does it matter to you?"

Mr. Burton turned away his head; he stamped his foot slightly on the floor in impatience. "What is the use?" he said, as if to himself, "you might teach an elephant to fly sooner than make a woman understand about business. Without being anything to me, it might be something to my friends."

"Is that man—that—Golden—is he your friend?"

"Of course he is," said Mr. Burton roughly, with a certain defiance. "You are prejudiced against him unjustly. But he is my friend, and a very good fellow too."

"Then it is better not to say any more," said Helen rising, trembling in every limb. "It is best not to say any more. Oh don't venture to name his name to me! If I had not been a woman, I should have—not killed him. That would have been too good."

Innocent men are killed, and you others look on, and never lift a finger. I would have pursued him till his last breath—crushed him—made him feel what he has done. And I will—if I have the power!"

She stood up confronting her cousin, trembling, yet glowing with that passion which the name of her husband's slanderer always roused within her. She was almost as tall as Burton was, and he felt as if she towered over him, and was cowed by the strength of her emotion. He rose too, but he shrank back a step, not knowing how to meet the spirit he had roused.

"These are nice Christian sentiments," he said, with an attempt at a sneer; but in his heart the man was afraid.

"I ask nobody what kind of sentiments they are," she cried. "If he had wronged me only, I would have forgiven him. But no man shall say his name before me—no man! I may not have the power; my friends may not have the power; but it is that, and not the will, which will fail if we fail."

I will never give up trying to punish him, never in my life!"

"Then you will be acting like a fool," Mr. Burton said; but he changed his tone, and took a great deal of trouble to persuade her to take her seat again, and discuss the matter calmly with him.

Norah stood up-stairs by the window, watching till he should go. The child's heart was bursting with rage and pain. She had never been sent away before; she had heard everything, had been always present whatever was going on. Her father, Dr. Maurice, Mr. Haldane, every one of them had spoken in her presence all that they had to say. And she remembered words that no one else remembered, scraps of talk which she could put together. She did so with a violent exercise of her memory as she stood there drumming on the window, and wondering when he would go. "He thinks I am only a child," she said to herself, in the fiery commotion of her spirits, and thought of a hundred things she could do to prove the contrary. She would go to Dr. Maurice; she would let "everybody" know. He was no friend; he was a conspirator against them—one of those who killed her father. Every moment that passed inflamed Norah more. She stood at the window and watched, thinking would he never be gone, thinking, oh why could not she make herself grow—make herself a woman! What her mother had done was nothing to what Norah felt herself capable of doing. Every vein in her body, and every nerve had begun to thrill and tremble

before she heard the sound down-stairs of the door opening, and saw him go hastily away.

This was what he said when he opened the door of the sitting-room down-stairs—

"You will do what you please, of course. I have found out before now what it is to struggle with an unreasonable woman. Do what you like. Drag your husband's name through the dirt again. Throw all sorts of new light on his motives. That is what you will do. People might have forgotten it; but after what you are going to do, they will never forget. And that is all you will have for your pains—you may be sure you can do nothing to us."

"Us?" said Helen. "You told me you were not concerned."

And then Mr. Burton changed color and lost his temper.

"You drive a man wild," he cried. "You exasperate me so that I don't know what I am saying. Of course you know what I mean, though you pretend you don't. I mean my friends. And you know that; and you know how much you owe to me, and yet the answer I get is—this!"

He slammed the door after him like an angry maid-servant; he strode hastily away to his own house, with a face which of itself gave a new paralytic seizure to Old John at the lodge. He filled everybody with consternation in his own house. And Helen stood still after he had left her, half exultant, half stupefied. *U!* Had she found his cunning manœuvres out?



PART VIII

CHAPTER XXII.



R. M A U-
RICE came
down next
day. He
was a man
of very quiet
manners,
and yet he
was unable
to conceal a
certain ex-
citement.
He walked
into the
Gatehouse
with an air
of abstrac-
tion, as if he
did not quite
know what
he was

about.

"I have come to talk about business," he said, but he did not send Norah away. Probably had he not been so glad to see her once more, it would have surprised him to see the child whom he had never beheld apart from a book, standing up by her mother's chair, watching his face, taking in every word. Norah's role had changed since those old days. She had no independent standing then; now she was her mother's companion, champion, supporter. This changes as nothing else can do a child's life.

"Our case is to be heard for the first time to-morrow," he said. "I believe they are all very much startled. Golden was brought before the magistrate yesterday; he has been admitted to bail, of course. If I could have had the satisfaction of thinking that rascal was even one night in prison! But that was too much to hope for. Mrs. Drummond, can you guess who was his bail?"

Helen shook her head, not understanding quite what he meant; but all the same she knew what his answer would be. He brought it out with a certain triumph—

"Why, Burton—your precious cousin! I knew it would be so. As sure as that sun is shining, Burton is at the bottom of it all. I have seen it from the first."

"Dr. Maurice," said Helen, "where have I seen, where have I read, 'Burton and

Golden have done it?' The words seem to haunt me. It cannot be fancy."

Dr. Maurice took out his pocket-book. He took a folded paper from an inner pocket, and held it to her without a word. Poor Helen, in the composure which she had attained so painfully, began to shake and tremble; the sight of it moved her beyond her self-control. She could not weep, but her strained nerves quivered, her teeth chattered, her frame was convulsed by the shock. "Ah!" she cried, as people do when they receive a blow; and yet now she remembered it all—every word; it seemed to be written on her heart.

The physician was alarmed. Human emotion has many ways of showing itself, but none more alarming than this. He put the letter hastily away again, and plunged into wild talk about the way she was living, the house, and the neighbourhood.

"You are taking too little exercise. You are shutting yourself up too much," he said, with something of that petulance which so often veils pity. He was not going to encourage her to break down by being sorry for her; the other way, he thought, was the best. And then he himself was on the very borders of emotion too, the sight of these words had brought poor Robert so keenly to his mind. And they had brought to his mind also his own hardships. Norah in her new place was very bewildering to him. He had noted her closely while her mother was speaking, and with wonder and trouble had seen a woman look at him through the girl's brown eyes—a woman, a new creature, an independent being, whom he did not know, whom he would have to treat upon a different footing. This discovery, which he had not made at the first glance, filled him with dismay and trouble. He had lost the child whom he loved.

"Norah, come and show me the house," he said, with a certain despair; and he went away, leaving Helen to recover herself. That was better than going back upon the past, recalling to both the most painful moments of their life.

He took Norah's hand, and walked through the open door into the garden, which was the first outlet he saw.

"Come and tell me all about it," he said. "Norah, what have you been doing to yourself? Have you grown up in these three



“HE TOOK MORRIS’S HAND AND WALKED THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR INTO THE GARDEN.”—(See page 103.)

months? You are not the little girl I used to know."

"Oh, Dr. Maurice, do you think I have grown?" cried Norah, with her whole heart in the demand.

And it would be impossible to describe what a comfort this eager question was to him. He laughed, and looked down upon her, and began to feel comfortable again.

"Do you know, I am afraid you have not grown," he said, putting his other hand fondly on her brown hair. "Are you vexed, Norah? For my part, I like you best as you are."

"Well, it cannot be helped," said Norah, with resignation. "I did not think I had; but for a moment I had just a little hope, you looked so funny at me. Oh, Dr. Maurice, I do so wish I was grown up!—for many things. First, there is Mr. Burton, who comes and bullies mamma. I hate that man. I remember at home, in the old days, when you used to be talking, and nobody thought I paid any attention——"

"What do you remember, Norah?"

"Oh, heaps of things. I can scarcely tell you. They would look at each other—I mean Mr. Golden and he. They would say things to each other. Oh, I don't remember what the words were; how should I remember the words? but things—just as you might look at me, and give a little nod, if we had something that was a secret from mamma. I know they had secrets, these two. If I were grown up, and could speak, I would tell him so. Dr. Maurice, can't we punish them? I cannot imagine," cried Norah passionately, "what God can be thinking of to let them alone, and let them be happy, after all they have done to—poor papa!"

"Norah, these are strange things for you to be thinking of," said Dr. Maurice, once more disturbed by a development which he was not acquainted with.

"Oh, no. If you knew how we live, you would not think them strange. I am little; but what does that matter? There is mamma on one side, and there is Mr. Haldane. How different we all used to be! Dr. Maurice, I remember when poor Mr. Haldane used to take me up, and set me on his shoulder; and look at him now! Oh, how can any one see him, and bear it? But it does no good to cry."

"But, Norah, that is not Mr. Burton's fault."

"No, not that; but, oh, it is God's fault," said Norah, sinking her voice to a whisper, and ending with a burst of passionate tears.

"Hush, hush, hush!" He took her hand into both of his, and soothed her. Thoughts like these might float through a man's mind involuntarily, getting no utterance; but it horrified him to hear them from the lips of a child. Was she a child? Dr. Maurice said to himself once more, with an inward groan, that his little Norah, his dream-child of the fairy tales, was gone, and he should find her no more.

"And then it rather vexes one to be so little," she said, suddenly drying her eyes, "because of Clara. Clara is not twelve yet, and she is much bigger than I am. She can reach to these roses—look—while I can't get near them; and they are the only roses we have now. But, after all, though it may be nice to be tall, it doesn't matter very much, do you think, for a woman? So mamma says; and girls are just as often little as tall—in books."

"For my part, I am fond of little women," said Dr. Maurice, and this time he laughed within himself. She kept him between the two, changing from childhood to womanhood without knowing it. "But tell me, who is Clara? I want to know about your new friends here."

"Clara is Clara Burton, and very like him," said Norah. "I thought I should be fond of her at first, because she is my cousin; but I am not fond of her. Ned is her brother. I like him better. He is a horsey, doggy sort of boy; but then he has always lived in the country, and he knows no better. One can't blame him for that, do you think?"

"Oh, no," said Dr. Maurice, with great seriousness; "one can't blame him for that." The man's heart grew glad over the child's talk. He could have listened to her running on about her friends for ever.

"And then there was—some one else," said Norah, instinctively drawing herself up; "not exactly a boy; a—gentleman. We saw him in town, and then we saw him here; first with that horrible man, Mr. Golden, and another day with the Burtons. But you are not to think badly of him for that. He was—on our side."

"Who is this mysterious personage, I wonder?" said Dr. Maurice smilingly; but this time it was not a laugh or a groan, but a little shivering sensation of pain that ran through him, he could not tell why.

"He was more like Fortunatus than any one," said Norah. "But he could not be like Fortunatus in everything, for he said he was poor, like us—though that might be only, as I say it myself, to spite Clara. Well, he was grown up—taller than you are, Dr. Mar-

rice—with nice curling sort of hair, all in little twists and rings, and beautiful eyes. They flashed up so when mamma spoke. Mamma was very, very angry talking to that horrible man at our own very door. Fancy, he had dared to go and call and leave his horrid card. I tore it into twenty pieces, and stamped upon it. It was silly, I suppose; but to think he should dare to call—at our own very house——”

“I am getting dreadfully confused, Norah, between the beautiful eyes and the horrible man. I don’t know what I am about. Which was which?”

“Oh, Dr. Maurice, how could you ask such a question? Are there two such men in the world? It was *that* Mr. Golden whom I hate; and Mr. Rivers—Cyril Rivers—was with him, not knowing—but he says he will never go with him again. I saw it in his eyes in a moment; he is on our side.”

“You are young to read eyes in this way. I do not think I quite like it, Norah,” said Dr. Maurice, in a tone which she recognised at once.

“Why, you are angry. But how can I help it?” said Norah, growing a woman again. “If you were like me, Dr. Maurice—if you felt your mamma had only you—if you knew there was nobody else to stand by her, nobody to help her, and you so little! I am obliged to think; I cannot help myself. When I grow up, I shall have so much to do; and how can I know whether people are on our side or against us, except by looking at their eyes?”

“Norah, my little Norah!” cried the man pitifully, “don’t leave your innocence for such fancies as these. Your mother has friends to think for her and you—many friends; I myself, for example. As long as I am alive, do you require to go and look for people to be on your side? Why, child, you forget *me*.”

Norah looked at him searchingly, penetrating, as he thought, to the bottom of his heart.

“I did not forget you, Dr. Maurice. You are fond of me and of—poor papa. But I have to think of *her*. I don’t think you love *her*. And she has the most to bear.”

Dr. Maurice did not make any reply. He did not love Helen; he even shrank from the idea with a certain prudish sense of delicacy—an old bachelor’s bashfulness. Love Mrs. Drummond! Why, it was out of the question. The idea disconcerted him. He had been quite pained and affected a moment before at the thought that his little Norah—

the child that he was so fond of—should want other champions. But now he was disconcerted, and in front of the grave little face looking up at him, he did not even dare to smile. Norah, however, was as ready to raise him up as she had been to cast him down.

“Do you think Cyril is a pretty name, Dr. Maurice?” she asked. “I think it sounds at first a little weak—too pretty for a boy. So is Cecil. I like a rough, round sort of name—Ned, for instance. You never could mistake Ned. One changes one’s mind about names, don’t you think? I used to be all for Gerald and Cyrils and pretty sounds like that; now I like the others best. Clara is pretty for a girl; but everybody thinks I must be Irish, because I’m called Norah. Why was I called Norah, do you know? Charlie Dalton calls me Norah Creina.”

“Here is some one quite fresh. Who’s Charlie Dalton?” said Dr. Maurice, relieved.

“Oh, one of the Rectory boys: There are so many of them! What I never can understand,” cried Norah suddenly, “is the difference among people. Mr. Dalton has eight children, and mamma has only one; now why? To be sure, it would have been very expensive to have had Charlie and all the rest on so little money as we have now. I suppose we could not have done it. And, to be sure, God must have known that, and arranged it on purpose,” the child said, stopping short with a puzzled look. “Oh, Dr. Maurice, when He knew it all, and could have helped it if He pleased, why did He let them kill poor papa?”

“I do not know,” said Dr. Maurice under his breath.

It was a relief to him when, a few minutes after, Helen appeared at the garden door, having in the meantime overcome her own feelings. They were all in a state of repression, the one hiding from the other all that was strongest in them for the moment. Such a thing is easily done at twelve years old. Norah ran along the garden path to meet her mother, throwing off the shadow in a moment. But for the others it was not so easy. They met, and they talked of the garden, what a nice old-fashioned garden it was, full of flowers such as one rarely sees nowadays. And Dr. Maurice told Norah the names of some of them, and asked if the trees bore well, and commented upon the aspect, and how well those pears ought to do upon that warm wall. These are the disguises with which people hide themselves when that within does not bear speaking of. There was a

great deal more to be told still, and business to be discussed; but first these perverse hearts had to be stilled somehow in their irregular beating, and the tears which were too near the surface got rid of, and the wistful, questioning thoughts silenced.

After a while Dr. Maurice went to pay Stephen Haldane a visit. He, too, was concerned in the business which brought the doctor here. The two men went into it with more understanding than Helen could have had. She wanted only that Golden should be punished, and her husband's name vindicated—a thing which it seemed to her so easy to do. But they knew that proof was wanted—proof which was not forthcoming. Dr. Maurice told Haldane what Helen gave him no opportunity to tell her—that the lawyers were not sanguine. The books which had disappeared were the only evidence upon which Golden's guilt and Drummond's innocence could be either proved or disproved. And all the people about the office, from the lowest to the highest, had been summoned to tell what they knew about those books. Nobody, it appeared, had seen them removed; nobody had seen the painter carry them away; there was this negative evidence in his favour, if no other. But there was nothing to prove that Golden had done it, or any other person involved, and, so far as this was concerned, obscurity reigned over the whole matter—an obscurity not pierced as yet by any ray of light.

"At all events, we shall fight it out," said Dr. Maurice. "The only thing to be risked now is a little money more or less, and that, I suppose, a man ought to be willing to risk for the sake of justice—myself especially, who have neither chick nor child."

He said this in so dreary a way that poor Stephen smiled. The man who was removed from any such delights—who could never improve his own position in any way, nor procure for himself any of the joys of life, looked at the man who thus announced himself with a mixture of gentle ridicule and pity.

"That at least must be your own fault," he said; and then he thought of himself, and sighed.

No one knew what dreams might have been in Stephen Haldane's mind before he became the wreck he was. Probably no one ever would know. He smiled at the other, but for himself he could not restrain a sigh.

"I don't see how it can be said to be my own fault," said Dr. Maurice with whimsical petulance. "There are preliminary steps, of course, which one might take—but not ne-

cessarily with success—not by any means certainly with success. I tell you what, though, Haldane," he added hastily, after a pause, "I'd like to adopt Norah Drummond. That is what I should like to do. I'd be very good to her; she should have everything she could set her face to. To start a strange child from the beginning, even if it were one's own, is always like putting into a lottery. A baby is no better than a speculation. How do you know what it may turn out? whereas a creature like Norah—Ah, that is what I should like, to adopt such a child as that!"

"To adopt—Norah?" Stephen grew pale. "What! to take her from her mother! to carry away the one little gleam of light!"

"She would be a gleam of light to me too," said Dr. Maurice, "and I could do her justice. I could provide for her. Her mother, if she cared for the child's interest, ought not to stand in the way. There! you need not look so horror-stricken. I don't mean to attempt it. I only say that is what I should like to do."

But the proposal, even when so lightly made, took away Stephen's breath. He did not recover himself for some time. He muttered, "Adopt—Norah!" under his breath, while his friend talked on other subjects. He could not forget it. He even made Dr. Maurice a little speech when he rose to go away. He put out his hand and grasped the other's arm in the earnestness of his interest.

"Look here, Maurice," he said, "wealth has its temptations as well as poverty; because you have plenty of money, if you think you could make such a proposition——"

"What proposition?"

"To take Norah from her mother. If you were to tempt Mrs. Drummond for the child's sake to give up the child, by promising to provide for her, or whatever you might say—if you were to do that, God forgive you, Maurice—I know I never could!"

"Of course I shall not do it," said Maurice hastily. And he went away with the feeling in his mind that this man, too, was his rival, and his successful rival. The child was as good as Stephen's child, though so far removed from himself. Dr. Maurice was so far wrong that it was Helen Stephen was thinking of, and not Norah. The child would be a loss to him; but the loss of her mother would be so much greater that the very thought of it oppressed his soul. He

had grown to be Helen's friend in the truest sense; he had felt her sympathy to be almost too touching to him, almost too sweet; and he could not bear the possibility of seeing her deprived of her one solace. He sat alone after Maurice had gone away (for his mother and sister had left them to have their conversation unfettered by listeners), and pondered over the possible fate of the mother and child. The child would grow up; in a very few years she would be a woman; she would marry, in all likelihood, and go away, and belong to them no more; and Helen would be left to bear her lot alone. She would be left in the middle of her days to carry her burden as she might, deserted by every love that had once belonged to her. What a lot would that be!—worse, even, than his own, who, amid all his pains, had two hearts devoted to him never to be disjoined from him but by death. Poor Stephen, you would have supposed, was himself in the lowest depths of human suffering and solitude; but yet he looked down upon a lower still, and his heart bled for Helen, who, it might be, would have to descend into that abyss in all the fulness of her life and strength. What a sin would that man's be, he thought, who arbitrarily, unnaturally, should try to hasten on that separation by a single day!

Dr. Maurice went back to the other side of the house, and had his talk out quietly with Mrs. Drummond; he told her what he had told Haldane, while Norah looked at him over her mother's chair, and listened to every word. To her he said that it was the lawyers' opinion that they might do good even though they proved nothing—they would stir up public opinion; they might open the way for further information. And with this, perhaps, it might be necessary to be content.

"There is one way in which something might be possible," he said. "All the people about the office have been found and called as witnesses, except one. That was the night-porter, who might be an important witness; but I hear he lives in the country, and has been lost sight of. He might know something; without that we have no proof whatever. I for my own part should as soon think the sun had come out of the skies, but Drummond, for some reason we know nothing of, might have taken those books——"

"Are you forsaking him too?" cried Helen in her haste.

"I am not in the least forsaking him," said Dr. Maurice; "but how can we tell what had been said to him—what last re-

source he had been driven to? If we could find that porter there might be something done. He would know when they were taken away."

Helen made no answer; she did not take the interest she might have done in the evidence. She said softly, as if repeating to herself—

"Burton and Golden, Burton and Golden!" Could it be? What communication could they have had? how could they have been together? This thought confused her, and yet she believed in it as if it were gospel. She turned it over and over like a strange weapon of which she did not know the use.

"Yes, something may come out of that. We may discover some connection between them when everything is raked up in this way. Norah thinks so too. Norah feels that they are linked together somehow. Will you come with me to the station, Norah, and see me away?"

"We are both going," said Helen. And they put on their bonnets and walked to the railway with him through the early twilight. The lights were shining out in the village windows as they passed, and in the shops, which made an illumination here and there. The train was coming from town—men coming from their work, ladies returning, who had been shopping in London, meeting their children, who went to carry home the parcels, in pleasant groups. The road was full of a dozen little domestic scenes, such as are to be seen only in the neighbourhood of London. A certain envy was in the thoughts of all three as they passed on. Norah looked at the boys and girls with a little sigh, wondering how it would feel to have brothers and sisters, to be one of a merry happy family. And Helen looked at them with a different feeling, remembering the time when she, too, had gone to meet her own people who were coming home. As for Dr. Maurice, of course it was his own fault. He had chosen to have nobody belonging to him, to shut himself off from the comfort of wife and child. Yet he was more impatient of all the cheerful groups than either of the others.

"Talk of the country being quiet! it is more noisy than town," he said; he had just been quietly pushed off the pavement by a girl like Norah, who was running to meet her father. That should have been nothing to him, surely, but he felt injured. "I wish you would come with me and keep my house for me, Norah," he said, with a vain harping on his one string; and Norah laughed with gay freedom at the thought.

"Good night, Dr. Maurice; come back soon," she said, waving her hand to him, then turned away with her mother, and did not even look back. He was quite sure about this, as he settled himself in the corner of the carriage. So fond as he was of the child; so much as he would have liked to have done for her! And she never so much as looked back!

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN Helen and Norah emerged again out of the lights of the little railway station to the darkness glimmering with a few lamps of the road outside, Mr. Burton's phaeton was standing at the gate. The air was touched with the first frost, there was a soft haze over the distances, the lamps shone with a twinkling glow, and the breath of the horses was faintly visible in the sharpened air. Mr. Burton was standing talking to some one on the pathway accompanied by his son Ned, who though he was but a year older than Norah was nearly as tall as his father. Helen's last interview with her cousin had not been pleasant enough to tempt her to linger now for any greeting, and her heart was sore and wroth against him. She put her veil down over her face, and hurried past. But Mr. Burton had seen her, and long before this he had repented of his rudeness of last night. Had it been successful, had he succeeded in bullying and frightening her, he would have been perfectly satisfied with himself; but he had not succeeded, and he was sorry for the cruelty which had been in vain. It was so much power wasted, and his wisest course now was to ignore and disown what he had done. He stopped short in his conversation, and made a step after her.

"Ah, Helen!" he cried, "you out this cold evening! Wait a moment, I will take you with me. I am going to pass your door."

"Thanks," said Helen, "I think we prefer to walk." And she was going resolutely on; but she was not to be allowed so easily to make her escape.

"One moment. I have something to say to you. If you will not drive with me, I will walk with you," said Mr. Burton, in his most genial mood. "Good evening, Tait, we can finish our talk to-morrow. Well, and where have you been, you two ladies?—seeing some one off by the train? Ned, see if you can't amuse your cousin Norah while I talk to her mother. Helen, when you and I were that age I think we found more to say."

"I do not think we were great friends—at that age," said Helen.

She had meant to say at any age; but the gravity of her thoughts made such light utterances of her anger impossible. When people are going to serious war with each other, they may denounce and vituperate, but they rarely gibe.

"No; I suppose it was at a later period we were friends," Mr. Burton said, with a laugh. "How strangely circumstances alter! I am afraid I made myself rather disagreeable last night. When a man is bilious, he is not accountable for his actions; and I had been worried in town; but 'it was too bad to go and put it out on you; what I really wanted to ask last night was if the house was quite in order for the winter? But something brought on the other subject, and I lost my temper like an idiot. I hope you won't think any more of it. And it is really important to know if the house is in order—if you are prepared to run the risk of frost, and all that. I was speaking to Tait, the carpenter, this moment. I think I shall send him just to look over the house."

Helen made no reply; this talk about nothing, this pretence of ease and familiarity, was an insult to her. And Norah clung close to her arm, enclosing it with both hands, calling her mother's attention to every new sentence with a closer pressure. They went on for a few minutes before Mr. Burton could invent anything more to say, and Ned stalked at Norah's other side with all a boy's helplessness. He certainly was not in a condition to help his father out.

"Ned has been up to town with me to-day," said Mr. Burton, still more cheerfully. "It will be a loss, but we must make up our minds to send him to school. It is a disadvantage to him being so tall; everybody thinks he is fifteen at least. It is handy for you that Norah is so small. You can make a baby of her for three or four years yet."

Here Norah squeezed her mother's arm so tight that Helen winced with the pain, yet took a kind of forlorn amusement too from the fury of the child's indignation.

"Norah is no baby," she said, "happily for me; Norah is my best companion and comfort."

"Ah, yes; she is in your confidence; that is charming," said Mr. Burton; "quite like a story-book; whereas Ned, the great block-head, cares for nothing but his dogs and nonsense. But he shall be packed off to Eton directly. The house is so full at present, my

wife has been regretting we have seen nothing of you, Helen. I suppose it is too early to ask you to come to us under present circumstances? But after a while, I hope, when we are alone—And Norah must come before Ned goes away. There is to be a children's party. What did your mother settle about that, Ned?"

"Don't know," growled Ned at Norah's other side.

"Don't know! Well you ought to know, since it's in your honour. Clara will send you word, Helen. Now, I suppose, I must be off, or I shall not have time to dress. Why, by Jove, there goes the bell already!" cried Mr. Burton.

He looked round, and the bays, which had been impatiently following at a footpace, held in with difficulty by the groom, stopped at the sign he made, while the sonorous dinner-bell, which rang twice every evening through all seasons, sounded its first summons through the darkness. There was something very awe-inspiring in the sound of that bell. That, as much as anything, impressed the village and neighbourhood with a sense of the importance of the master of Dura. The old Harcourts had used it only on very great occasions; but the Burtons used it every evening. All the cooks in Dura village guided themselves by its sound. "Lord, bless us! there's the bell agoing at the great house, and my chickens not put down to roast yet," Mrs. Witherspoon at the Rectory would say, giving herself such "a turn" as she did not get over all the evening. Mr. Burton, too, got "a turn" when he heard it.

He cried, "Good night, Helen! Ned, come along," and jumped into his phaeton.

"I'll walk," shouted Ned.

And then there was a jingle, a flash, a dart, and the two bays flew, as if something had stung them, along the frosty road.

"It will be a long walk for you up that dark avenue," said Helen, when the boy, with his hands in his pockets, stood by them at the door of the Gatehouse, hesitating with the awkwardness natural to his kind.

"Oh, I don't mind," said Ned.

"Will you come in—and have some tea?"

Never was an invitation more reluctantly given. When his mother heard of it, it flashed through her mind that Mrs. Drummond had constructed the first parallel, and that already the siege of Ned, the heir of Dura, had begun; but Helen had no such idea. And Norah squeezed her arm with a

force of indignation which once more, though she was not merry, made her mother smile.

"Mamma, how could you?" Norah cried, when the boy had come in, and had been left by the bright little fire in the drawing-room to watch the flickering of the lights while his entertainers took off their bonnets; "how could you? It is I who will have to talk to him and amuse him. It was selfish of you, mamma!"

And Ned sat by the drawing-room fire alone, repenting himself that he had been seduced, in his big boots, with mud on his stockings, into this unknown place. It was not actually unknown to him; he had broken the old china cups and thumped upon the piano, and done his best to put his fingers through the old curtains more than once while the place was empty. But he did not understand the change that had passed upon it now. He sat by the fire confused; wondering how he had ever had the courage to come in; wondering if Mrs. Drummond would think him dirty, and what Norah would say. He would not have to put himself into velvet and silk stockings and show himself in the drawing-room at home, that was a comfort. But what unknown mazes of conversation, what awful abysses of self-betrayal might there be before him here! Norah came in first, which at once frightened and relieved him. And the room was pretty—the old homely neutral-tinted room, with the lively gleam of firelight lighting it up, and all the darkness made rosy in the corners; which was so different from the drawing-room at the great house, with its gilding and grandeur, its masses of flowers and floods of light. Ned's head felt very much confused by the difference; but the strangeness awed him in spite of himself.

"I am always frightened in this room," said Norah, drawing the biggest chair into the circle of the firelight, and putting herself in to it like a little queen. She was so small that her one foot which hung down did not reach the floor; the other, I am sorry to say, so regardless was Norah of decorum, was tucked under her in the big chair.

"What a funny girl you are! Why?"

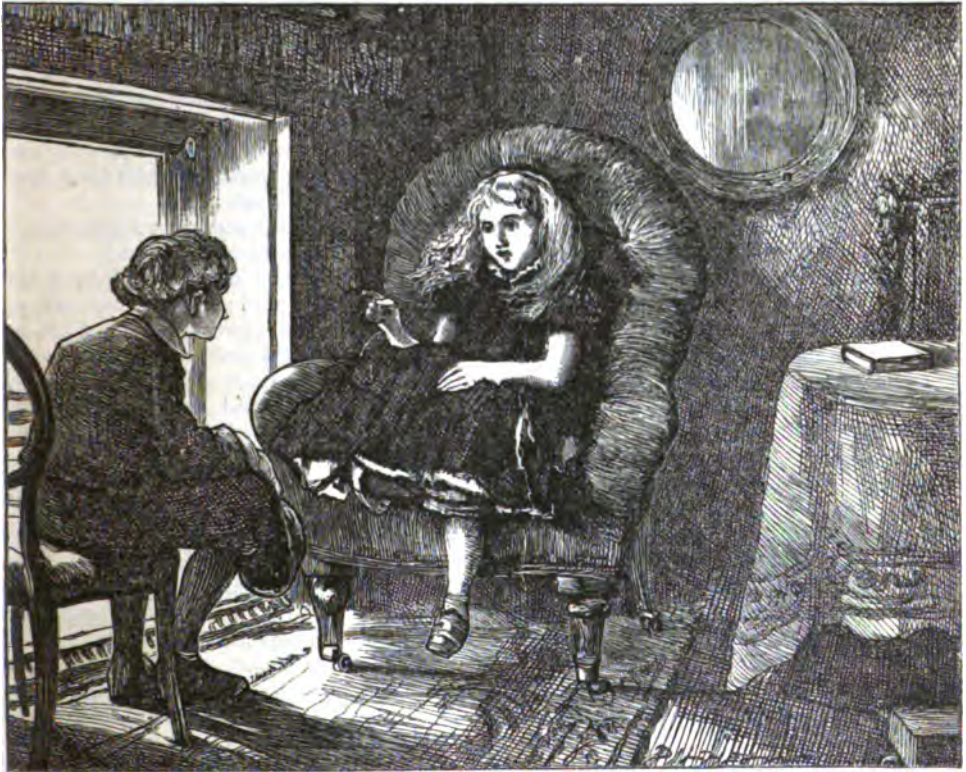
"Do you see that cupboard?" said Norah. "I know there is an old woman who lives there, and spins and spins, and keeps looking at me, till I daren't breathe. Oh, I think sometimes if I look up it will turn me to stone, that eye of hers. If you weren't here I shouldn't dare to say it; I am most frightened for her in the day, when the light comes in at all the windows, and all the pictures

and things say, 'What's that little girl doing here?' And then the mirror up on the wall—There's two people in it I know, now. You will say it's you and me; but it isn't you and me. It's our ghosts, perhaps, sitting so still, and looking at each other and never saying a word."

Ned felt a shiver run over him as he listened. He thought of the dark avenue which he had to go through all by himself, and wished he had driven with his father instead. And there where he was sitting he just caught that curious little round mirror, and

there were two people in it—never moving, never speaking, just as Norah said.

"There is always a feeling as if somebody were by in this house," Norah went on, "somebody you can't see. Oh, it is quite true. You can't go anywhere, up or down, but they always keep looking and looking at you. I bear it as long as I can, and then I get up and run away. I should not mind so much if I could see them, or if they were like the ladies that walk about and rustle with long silk trains going over the floor, as they do in some old houses. But the



ones here are so still; they just look at you for hours and hours together, till you get into such a dreadful fright, and feel you can't bear it any longer and rush away."

Just then there was the sound of a little fall of ashes from the fire which made Ned start; and then he laughed hoarsely, frightened, but defiant.

"You are making it all up out of your own head to frighten a fellow," he said.

"To frighten—a fellow!" said Norah, with gentle but ineffable contempt. "What have I to do with—fellows? It frightens *me*."

And she gave a little shudder in her big chair, and shook her head, waving her brown hair about her shoulders. Perhaps the colour in her hair would not have showed so much but for the black frock with its little white frill that came to the throat; and the firelight found out Norah's eyes, and kindled two lamps in them. She was all made up of blackness and brightness, a shadow child, not much of her apparent except the pale face and the two lights in her eyes—unless, indeed, it were that one leg, hanging down from under the black frock, with a wh

stocking on it, and a varnished, fire-reflecting shoe.

Never in Ned's life had he experienced anything like this before; the delicious thrill of visionary terror made the actual pleasantness of the warm corner he sat in all the pleasanter; he had thought himself past the age to have stories told to him; but nothing like Norah's visions had ever come in his way. No happiness, however, is perfect in this world. The dark avenue would come across him by moments with a thrill of terror. But the old woman could not sit and spin, that was certain, in the dark, windy, lonely avenue; there would be no mirror there to reflect his passing figure; and he would run; and if the dogs were about they would come to meet him; so the boy took courage and permitted himself to enjoy this moment, which was a novelty in his life. Then Mrs. Drummond came in with her black dress like Norah's, and the long white streamers to her cap, which looked like wings, he thought. Her sorrowful look, her soft voice, that air about her of something subdued and stilled, which had not always been so, impressed the boy's imagination. Ned was an honest, single-hearted boy, and he looked with awe upon any suffering which he could understand. He explained afterwards that Helen looked as if she were very sorry about something. "Awfully sorry—but not bothering," he said, and the look of self-control impressed him, though he could not tell why. Altogether it was so different from home; so much more attractive to the imagination. There was no dimness, no shadows at the great house. There nobody ever sat in the firelight, nor "took things into their heads;" and here everything was so shadowy, so soft, so variable; the fire light gleaming suddenly out now and then, the air so full of mystery. Everything that is strange is attractive to the young fancy to begin with; and there was more than simple novelty here.

Helen brought the lamp in her hand and set it down on the table, which to some extent disturbed his picture; and then she came and sat down by the children, while Susan—old Susan, who was a landmark to Ned, keeping him to reality in the midst of all this wonderfulness—brought in and arranged the tea.

"Are you sure they will not be anxious?" said Helen. "I am afraid your mother will be unhappy about you when she finds you don't come."

"Oh, she'll never find out," said Ned.

"Unhappy! I don't suppose mamma would be unhappy for that; but I'll get home before they come out from dinner. I shan't dress though, it would be absurd, at nine o'clock."

"It will be a dark walk for you up the avenue," said Helen kindly; and when she said this Ned shrank into his corner and shivered slightly. She added, "You are not afraid?"

"Oh no—I should hope not!" said Ned.

"I should be afraid," said Norah tranquilly; "the wind in the trees always makes me feel strange. It sounds so moaning and dreary, as if it were complaining. We don't do it any harm that it should complain. It is like something that is in prison and wants to get out. Do you know any stories about forest spirits? I don't like them very much; they are always dwarfs, or trolls, or something grim—funny little men, hairy all over, that sit under the trees with their long arms, and dart out when you pass."

Ned gave another suppressed shiver in his corner, and Helen came to his aid.

"Norah has read nothing but fairy tales all her life," she said; "but I daresay you know a great deal more than she does, and don't care for such foolish things. You are going to Eton? I was once there when all the boats were out, and there were fireworks at night. It was so pretty. I daresay when you are there you will get into the boats."

"I shall try," said Ned, lighting up. "I mean to be very good at athletics if I can. It does not matter if I work very hard, for I am going into papa's business, where I shan't want it. I am not going to Eton to work, but to get among a good set, and to do what other people do."

"Ah!" said Helen, with a smile. She took but a languid interest in Ned, and she was scarcely sorry that Mr. Burton's son showed no likelihood of distinguishing himself. She accepted it quite quietly, without any interest in the matter, which somehow troubled Ned, he could not have told why.

"At least, they say you're not obliged to work," he said, a little abashed. "I shall do as much as I can at that too."

And then there was a momentary silence, broken only by the ring of the teacups as Susan put them down. Ned had a feeling that no very profound interest was shown in his prospect and intentions, but he was used to that. He sat quite quiet, feeling very shy, and sadly troubled to find that Susan had placed the lamp where it threw its strongest

light upon himself. He drew his muddy boots and stockings as much as he could under his chair, and hoped Mrs. Drummond would not notice them; how foolish he had been to come, making an exhibition of himself! and yet it was very pleasant, too.

"Now you must come to the table and have some tea," said Helen, placing a chair for him with her own hand. Ned knew it was a gentleman's duty to do this for a lady, but he was so confused he did not feel capable of behaving like anything but a loutish boy; he turned everything he could think of as a pleasant subject of conversation over in his mind, with the idea of doing what he could to make himself agreeable; but nothing would come that he could produce. He sat and got through a great deal of bread and butter while he cudgelled his brains in this way. There was not much conversation. Helen was more silent than usual, having so much to think of; and Norah was amused by the unusual specimen of humanity before her, and distracted from the monologue with which she generally filled up all vacant places. At last Ned's efforts resolved themselves into speech.

"Oh, Mrs. Drummond, please, should you like to have a dog?" he said.

"I knew he was a doggy sort of a boy," Norah said to herself, throwing a certain serious pity into her contemplation of him. But yet the offer was very interesting, and suggested various excitements to come.

"What kind of a dog?" said Helen, with a smile.

"Oh, we have two or three different kinds. I was thinking, perhaps, a nice little Skye—like Shaggy, but smaller. Or if you would like a retriever, or one of old Dinah's pups."

"Thanks," said Helen. "I don't know what we should do with it, Ned; but it is very kind of you."

"Oh, no," said the boy, with a violent blush. "It would be a companion for—*her*, you know. It is so nice to have a dog to play with. Why, Shaggy does everything but talk. He knows every word I say. You might have Shaggy himself, if you like, while I am away."

"Oh, what a nice boy you are!" said Norah. "I should like it, Ned. Mamma does not want anything to play with; but I do. Give it to me! I should take such care of him! And then when you came home for the holidays, I should promise to take him to the station to meet you. I love Shaggy—he is such fun. He can't see out of his eyes; and he does so frisk and jump, and make an

object of himself. I never knew you were such a nice boy! Give him to me."

And then the two fell into the most animated discussion, while Helen sat silent and looked on. She forgot that the boy was her enemy's son. He was her cousin's son; some drops of blood-kindred to her ran in his veins. He was an honest, simple boy. Mrs. Drummond brightened upon him, according to her nature. She was not violently fond of children, but she could not shut her heart against an ingenuous, open face. She scarcely interfered with the conversation that followed, except to subdue the wild generosity with which Ned proposed to send everything he could think of to Norah. "There are some books about dogs, that will tell you just what to do. I'll tell John to bring them down. And there's—Are you very fond of books? You must have read thousands and thousands, I am sure."

"Not so many as that," Norah said modestly. "But I have got through—some."

"I could lend you—I am sure I could lend you—Papa has got a great big library; I forget how many volumes. They are about everything that books were ever written about. We never read them, except mamma, sometimes; but if you would like them—"

"You must not give her anything more," said Helen; "and even the dog must only come if your people are willing. You are too young to make presents."

"I am not so very young," cried Ned, who had found his voice. "I am near fourteen. When Cyril Rivers was my age, he was captain of fourth form;—he told me himself. But then he is very clever—much cleverer than me. Norah! if I should only be able to send Shaggy's puppy, not Shaggy himself, shall you mind?"

"Are you sure you will not be afraid to walk up the avenue alone?" said Mrs. Drummond, rising from the table. "I fear it will be so very dark; and we have no one to send with you, Ned."

"Oh, I don't want any one," said the boy; and he stumbled up to his feet, and put out his hand to say good night, feeling himself dismissed. Norah went to the door with him to let him out. "Oh, I wish I could go too," said Norah; "it is so lonely walking in the dark; but then I should have to get back. Oh, I do so wish you could stay. Don't you think you could stay? There are hundreds of rooms we don't use. Well, then, good night. I will tell you what I shall do. I shall stand at the door here and watch. If you should be frightened, you can shout, and

I will shout back ; and then you will always know that I am here. It is such a comfort when one is frightened to know there is some one there."

"I shan't be frightened," said Ned boldly. And he walked with the utmost valour and the steadiest step to the Hall gates, feeling Norah's eyes upon him. Then he stopped to shout—"Good night ; all right !"

"Good night !" rang through the air in Norah's treble. And then, it must be allowed, when he heard the door of the Gatehouse shut, and saw by the darkness of the lodge windows that old John and his daughter had gone to bed, that Ned's heart failed him a little. A wild recollection crossed his mind of the dwarfs, with their long arms, under the trees ; and of the old woman spinning, spinning, with eyes that fixed upon you for hours together ; and then, with his heart beating, he made one plunge into the gloom, under the overarching trees.

This is how Ned and Norah, knowing nothing about it, made, as they each described the process afterwards, "real friends." The bond was cemented by the gift of Shaggy's puppy some days after, and it was made permanent and eternal by the fact that very soon afterwards Ned went away to school.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MEANWHILE the great case of Rivers's bank came before the law courts and the public. It was important enough—for there was no war in those days—to be announced in big capitals on the placards of all the newspapers. *The Great Bank Case—Arrest of the Directors—Strange Disclosures in the City*—were the headings in the bills, repeated from day to day, and from week to week as the case went on. It was of course doubly attractive from the fact that it was founded upon a tragedy, and that every writer in the papers who referred to it at all was at liberty to bring in a discussion of the motives and intentions of "the unhappy man" who had introduced "a watery grave" into the question. A watery grave may not be pleasant for the occupant of it, but it is a very fine thing for the press. The number of times it appeared in the public prints at this period defies reckoning. In some offices the words were kept permanently in type. The *Daily Semaphore* was never tired of discussing what the feelings of the wretched man must have been when he stole down to the river just as all the world was going to rest, and plunged himself and his shame, and the books of the company under the turbid waters. The

Daily Semaphore held this view of the matter very strongly, and people said that Mr. Golden belonged to the same club as its editor, and that the two were intimate, which of course was a perfectly natural reason for its partisanship. Other journals, however, held different opinions. The weekly reviews, less addicted to fine writing, leaned to the side of the unfortunate painter. Their animadversions were chiefly upon the folly of a man interfering with business who knew nothing about it. When would it come to be understood, they said, that every profession required a training for itself, and that to dabble in the stocks without knowing how, was as bad, or at least as foolish, and more ruinous than to dabble in paint without knowing how. There was a great deal about the sutor, who should stick to his last in these discussions of the subject ; but, except in this particular, neither the *Sword* nor the *Looker-on* had a stone to throw at poor Drummond. Peace to his ashes, they said, he was a good painter. "During his lifetime we thought it our duty to point out the imperfections which lessened the effect of his generally most conscientious and meritorious work. It is the vocation of a critic, and happy is he who can say he has never exceeded the legitimate bounds of criticism, never given utterance to a hasty word, or inflicted unnecessary pain. Certain we are, for our own part, that our aim has always been to temper judgment with charity ; and now that a gap has been made in so melancholy a manner in the ranks of the Academy, we may venture to say that no man better deserved his elevation to the first rank of his profession than Robert Drummond ; no man we have ever known worked harder, or threw himself more entirely into his work. His feeling for art was always perfect. Now and then he might fail to express with sufficient force the idea he intended to illustrate ; but for harmony of conception, true sense of beauty, and tender appreciation of English sentiment and atmosphere, he has been surpassed by no painter of our modern school. We understand that an exhibition of his collected works is in contemplation, a plan which has been lately adopted with great success in so many cases. We do not doubt that a great many of our readers will avail themselves at once of the opportunity of forming a comprehensive judgment of the productions of a most meritorious artist, as well as of paying their tribute of sympathy to the, we firmly believe undeserved, misfortunes of an honest and honourable man."

It was thus the *Looker-on* expressed its sentiments. The *Sword* did not attempt to take up the same tone of melancholy superiority and noble-mindedness—qualities not in its way; but it made its stand after its own fashion against the ruthless judgments of the public. "No one can respect the British public more than we do," said that organ of the higher intellect; "its instincts are so unerring, and its good taste so unimpeachable, that, as a matter of course, we all bow to a decision more infallible than that of the Holiest Father that ever sat in Papal See. But after we have rendered this enlightened homage, and torn our victim to pieces, an occasional compunction will make itself audible within the most experienced bosom. After all, there is such a thing as probability to be taken into account. Truth, as we all know, is stranger than fiction; but yet the cases are so few in which fact outrages every likelihood that we are justified in looking very closely into the matter before we give an authoritative assent. So far as our personal knowledge goes, we should say that a painter is as much afraid of the money market as a woman is (or rather used to be) of a revolver, and that the dramatic completeness of the finale which the lively commercial imagination has accepted as that of poor Drummond, quite surpasses the homelier and milder invention of the daughters of art. A dramatic author, imbued with the true modern spirit of his art, might indeed find an irresistible attraction in the 'situation' of the drowning director, tossing the books of a joint-stock company before him into the abyss, and sardonically going down into Hades with the proofs of his guilt. But though the situation is fine, we doubt if even the dramatist would personally avail himself of it, for dramatists have a way of being tame and respectable like their neighbours. In our days your only emulator of the piratical and highway heroes of the past is the commercial man *pur sang*, who has not an idea in his head unconnected with business. It is he who convulses society with those witticisms and clevernesses of swindling which charm everybody; and it is he who gives us now and then the example of such a tragical conclusion as used to belong only to poetry. It is no longer the Bohemian, it is the Philistine, smug, clean, decorous, sometimes pious, who is the criminal of the nineteenth century."

This article made a great sensation in many circles. There were people who thought it was almost a personal libel, and that Golden

would be justified in "taking steps" against the paper, for who could that smug, clean, decorous Philistine be but he? But the manager was better advised. He was the hero of the day to all readers and writers. He was kept under examination for a whole week, badgered by counsel, snubbed by the judge, stared at by an audience which was not generally favourable; but yet he held his own. He was courageous, if nothing else. All that could be done to him in the way of cross-examination never made him falter in his story. Other pieces of information damaging to his character were produced by the researches of the attorneys. It was found that the fate of all the speculations in which he had been involved was suspiciously similar, and that notwithstanding those business talents which everybody allowed to be of the highest order, ruin and bankruptcy had followed at his heels wherever he went. The counsel for the prosecution paid him unbounded compliments on his ability, mingled with sarcastic condolence on this strange and unflinching current of misfortune. He led the witness into a survey of his past life with deadly accuracy and distinctness, damning him before all the world, as history only can damn. "It is unfortunate that this should have happened to you again after your previous disappointments," he said. "Yes, it was unfortunate," said the unhappy man. But he held such head against the torrent of facts thus brought up, that the sympathy of many people ran strongly in his favour for the moment. "Hang it all! which of us could stand this turn-up of everything that ever happened to him?" some said. Golden confronted it all with the audacity of a man who knew everything that could be said against him; and he held steadily by his story. He admitted that Drummond had done nothing in the business, and indeed knew next to nothing about it until that day in autumn, when, in the absence of all other officials, he had himself had recourse to him. "But the more inexperienced a man may be, the more impetuous he is—in business; when once he begins," said the manager. And that there was truth in this, nobody could deny. But gradually as the trial went on, certain mists cleared off and other mists descended. The story about poor Drummond and the books waned from the popular mind; it was dropped out of the leading articles in the *Semaphore*. If they had not gone into the river with the painter, where were they? Who had removed them? Were they de-

stroyed, or only hidden somewhere, to be found by the miraculous energy of the police? This question began to be the question which everybody discussed after a while; for by this time, though proof was as far off as ever, and nobody knew who was the guilty party, there had already fallen a certain silence, a something like respect, over that "watery grave."

And something more followed, which Helen Drummond scarcely understood, and which was never conveyed in words to the readers of the newspapers—a subtle, unexpressed sentiment, which had no evidence to back it but only that strange thrill of certainty which moves men's minds in spite of themselves. "I would just like to know what state Rivers's was in before it became a joint-stock company," was the most distinct expression of opinion any one was guilty of in public; and the persons to whom this speech was addressed would shake their heads in reply. The consequence was one which nobody could have distinctly accounted for, and which no one ventured to speak of plainly. A something, a breath, a mist, an intangible shadow, gathered over the names of the former partners who had managed the whole business, and transferred it to the new company. These were Mr. Burton and another, who has nothing to do with this history. In what condition had they handed it over? What induced them to dispose of such a flourishing business? And why was it that both had got so easily out of it with less loss than many a private shareholder? These were very curious questions, and took an immense hold on the public mind, though they were not discussed in the newspapers; for there are many things which move the public mind deeply, which it would not answer to put in the newspapers. As for Lord Rivers, he was a heavy loser, and nobody suspected for a moment that he knew anything about it. The City men were sorry for him as a victim; but round the names of Mr. Burton and his colleague there grew that indefinable shadow. Not a word could be said openly against them; but everybody thought the more. They were flourishing, men in great business—keeping up great houses, wearing all the appearance of prosperity. No righteous critic turned his back upon them. At kirk and at market they were as much applauded, as warmly received, to all outward appearance, as ever. But a cold breath of distrust had come round them, like an atmosphere. The first prick of the canker had come to this flower.

This was the unrecorded, undisclosed result of the inquiry, with which Helen Drummond, and the Haldanes, and all uninstructed, were so deeply dissatisfied. It had ended in nothing, they said. The managers and directors were acquitted, there being no proof against them. No authoritative contradiction had been or could be given to the theory of Robert Drummond's guilt. The *Semaphore* was still free to produce that "watery grave" any time it was in want of a phrase to round a paragraph. Their hearts had been wrung with the details of the terrible story all over again, and—nothing had come of it. "I told you it would be so," Mr. Burton said, who knew so much better. "It would have been much more sensible had you persuaded Maurice to leave it alone." But Maurice had a different tale to tell when he came to make his report to his anxious clients. He bewilderer them with the air of triumph he put on. "But nothing is proved," said Helen sadly. "No, nothing is proved," he said; "but everything is imputed." She shook her head, and went to her room, and knelt down before the Dives, and offered up to it, meaning no harm, what a devout Catholic would call an *acte de reparation*—an offering of mournful love and indignation—and, giving that, would not be comforted. "They cannot understand you, but I understand you, Robert," she said, in that agony of compunction and tenderness with which a true woman tries to make up to the dead for the neglect and coldness of the living. This was how Helen, in her ignorance, looked upon it. But Stephen Haldane understood better when he heard the tale. Golden, at least, would never hold up his head again—or, at least, if ever, not for long years, till the story had died out of men's minds. And the reputation of the others had gone down as by a breath. No one could tell what it was; but it existed—the first shadow, the beginning of suspicion. "I am satisfied," Dr. Maurice said, with a stern smile of triumph. The man had thrown himself entirely into the conflict, and took pleasure in that sweet savour of revenge.

"But Mrs. Drummond?" said Stephen, whose mind was moved by softer thoughts.

"That woman cannot understand," said Dr. Maurice. "Oh, I don't mean any slight to your goddess, your heroine. I may say she is not my heroine, I suppose? She can't understand. Why, Drummond is clear with everybody whose opinion is worth having. We have proved nothing, of course. I knew we could prove nothing. But he is as

clear as you or I—with all people who are worth caring for. She expected me to bring her a diploma, I suppose, under the Queen's hand and seal."

"I did not expect that," said Haldane; "but I did look for something more definite, I allow."

"More definite! It is a little hard to deal with people so exigent," said Dr. Maurice, discomfited in the midst of his enthusiasm. "Did you see that article in the *Looker-on*? The Drummond exhibition is just about to open; and that, I am confident, will be an answer in full. I believe the public will take that opportunity of proving what they think."

And so far Maurice turned out to be right. The public did show its enthusiasm—for two days. The first was a private view, and everybody went. The rooms were crowded, and there were notices in all the papers. The next day there was also a very fair attendance; and then the demonstration on the part of the public stopped. Poor Drummond was dead. He had been a good but not a great painter. His story had occupied quite as much attention as the world had to give him—perhaps more. He and his concerns—his bankruptcy, his suicide, and his pictures—had become a bore. Society wanted to hear no more of him. The exhibition continued open for several weeks, not producing nearly enough to pay its expenses, and then it was closed; and Drummond's story came to an end, and was heard of no more.

This is the one thing which excited people, wound up to a high pitch by personal misfortune or suffering, so seldom understand. They are prepared to encounter scurrility, opposition, even the hatred or the enmity of others; but they are not prepared for the certain fact that one time or other, most likely very soon, the world will get tired of them; it is their worst danger. This was what happened now to the Drummonds; but fortunately at Dura, in the depths of the silent country, it was but imperfectly that Helen knew. She was not aware how generally public opinion acquitted her husband, which was hard; and she did not know that the world was tired of him, which was well for her. He was done with, and put aside like a tale that is told; but she still went on planning in her own mind a wider vindication for him, an acquittal which this time it should be impossible to gainsay.

And quietness fell upon them, and the months began to flow on, and then the years, with no incident to disturb the calm. When

all the excitement of the trial was over, and everything done that could be done, then the calm reign of routine began. There were times, no doubt, in which Helen chafed and fretted at it; but yet routine is a great support and comfort to the worn and weary. It supplies a kind of dull motive to keep life going when no greater motives exist. The day commenced always with Norah's lessons. Helen was not an intellectual woman, nor did she feel herself consciously the better for such education as she had herself received; but such as she had received it she transmitted it conscientiously to Norah. She heard her read every morning a little English and a little French. She made her write a succession of copies, and do exercises in the latter language, and she gave her an hour's music. I fear none of this was done with very much spirit; but yet it was done conscientiously every morning of their lives except Sunday, when they went to church. She did it because it was right, because it was necessary, and her duty; but not with any strong sense of the elevated character of her employment, or expectation of any vast results from it. It had not produced very great results in herself. Her mind had worked busily enough all her life, but she did not believe that her music, or her French, or anything else she had learnt, had done her much good. Therefore she proceeded very calmly, almost coldly, with the same process, with Norah. It was necessary—it had to be done just as vaccination had to be done when the child was a baby; that was about all.

Then after the lessons they had their homely dinner, which Susan did not always cook to perfection; and then they took their walk; and in the evening there were lessons to be learned and needlework to do. When the child went to bed, her mother read—nothing to improve her mind. She was not bent upon improvement, unfortunately; indeed, it did not occur to her. She read; for the most part, novels from the circulating library. The reader, perhaps, is doing the same thing at this moment, and yet, most likely, he will condemn, or even despise, poor Helen. She had one or two books besides, books of poetry, though she was not poetically disposed in any way. She had "In Memoriam" by her, which she did not read (does any one who has ever lived in the valley of the shadow of death read "In Memoriam"?), but pored over night and day, thinking in it, scarcely knowing that her own mind had not spoken first in these words. And then there was Mr. Browning's poem of

"Andrea," the painter who had a wife. Helen would sit over her fire and watch it dying out at her feet, and ponder on Andrea's fate—wondering whether, perhaps, a woman might do badly for her husband, and yet be a spotless woman, no Lucrezia; whether she might sap the strength out of him with gentle words, and even while she loved him do him harm? Out of such a question as this she was glad to escape to her novel, the first that might come to hand.

And so many people in Helen's state of mind read novels—people who fly into the world of fiction as a frightened child flies into a lighted room, to escape the ghosts that are in the dark passages and echoing chambers—that it is strange so little provision is made for them, and that the love-story keeps uppermost in spite of all. Yet perhaps the love-story is the safest. The world-worn sufferer is often glad to forget all that reminds him of his own trouble, and even when he is not touched by the fond afflictions of the young people, finds a little pleasure in smiling at them in the exuberance of their misery. They think it is so terrible, poor babies, to be "crossed in love." The fact that they cannot have their own way is so astounding to them, something to rouse earth and heaven. Helen ran over a hundred tales of this description with a grave face, thankful to be interested in the small miseries which were to her own as the water spilt from a pitcher is to the sea. To be sure, there were a great many elevating and improving books which Helen might have had if she pleased, but nobody had ever suggested to her that it was necessary she should improve her mind.

And thus the time went on, and Mrs. Drummond dropped, as it were, into the background, into the shade and quietness of life. She was still young, and this decadence was premature. She felt it creeping upon her, but she took no pains to stop the process. So long as Norah was safe there was nothing beside for which she was called upon to exert herself; and thus with all her powers subdued, and the stream of life kept low, she lived on, voluntarily suppressing herself, as so many women do. And in the meantime new combinations were preparing, new personages coming upon the scene. While the older people stood aside, the younger ones put on their singing garments, and came forward with their flowery wreaths, with the sunshine upon their heads, to perform their romance, like the others before them. And so it happened that life had stolen imperceptibly away, so noiseless and soft that no one knew

of its going, until all at once there came a day when its progress could be no longer ignored. This was the day when Norah Drummond, eighteen years old, all decked and dressed by her mother's hands, spotless and radiant as the rose in her hair, with her heart full of hopes, and her eyes full of light, and no cloud upon her from all the tragic mists through which her youth had passed, went up the long avenue at Dura to the House which was brilliant with lamps and gay with music, to make her first appearance, as she thought, in the world. Norah's heart was beating, her gay spirit dancing already before she reached the door.

"Oh, I wonder, mamma, I wonder," she said, "what will happen? will anything happen to-night?" What could happen to her by her mother's side, among her old friends? She did not know; she went to meet it gaily. But Norah found it impossible to believe that this first triumphant evening, this moment of glory and delight, could pass away like the other evenings; that there should not be something in it, something unknown, sweet, and yet terrible, which should affect all her life.

CHAPTER XXV.

A GIRL'S first ball! What words more full of ecstasy could be breathed in this dull world! A vague, overwhelming vision of delight before she goes into it—all brightness, and poetry, and music, and flowers, and kind, admiring faces; everything converging towards herself as a centre, not with any selfish sense of exclusive enjoyment, but sweetly, spontaneously, as to the natural queen. A hundred unexpected, inexpressible emotions go to make up this image of paradise. There is the first glow and triumph of power which is at once a surprise to her and a joy. The feeling that she has come to the kingdom, that she herself has become the fair woman whose sway she has read of all her life; the consciousness, at last, that it is real, that womanhood is supreme in her person, and that the world bows down before her in her whiteness and brightness, in her shamefacedness and innocent confidence, in her empire of youth. She is the Una whose look can tame the lion; she is the princess before whose glance the whole world yields; and yet at the same time, being its queen, is she not the world's sweet handmaid, to scatter flowers in its path, and dance and sing to make it glad? All these thoughts are in the girl's mind, especially if she be a fanciful girl—though,

perhaps, she does not find words to express any of them; and this it is which throws such a charm to her upon the pleasure-making, which to us looks sometimes so stale and so poor.

And it is only after a long interval—unless her case be an exceptionally hard one—that she gets disenchanted. When she goes into the fairy palace, she finds it all that she thought; all, with the lively delight of personal enjoyment added, and that flattery of admiring looks, of unspoken homage, not to the ideal princess, or representative woman, but to *her*, which is so sweet and so new. Thus Norah Drummond entered the ball-room at Dura House, floating in, as it were, upon the rays of light that surrounded her—the new woman, the latest successor of Eve in the garden, unexact queen of the fresh world she had entered into, fearing no rivals—nay, reigning in the persons of her rivals as well as in her own. And when she had thus made her entrance in an abstract triumph, waking suddenly to individual consciousness, remembering that she was still Norah, and that people were looking at her, wondering at her, admiring her—her, and not another—she laughed as a child laughs for nothing, for delight, as she stood by her mother's side. It was too beautiful and wonderful to be shy of it.

"Pinch me, mamma, and it will all pass away like the other dreams," she whispered, holding fast by her mother's arm. But the curious thing, the amazing thing was, that it continued, and warmed her and dazzled her, and lighted her up, and did not pass away.

"Norah, come! you are to dance this dance with me," cried Ned, rushing up. He had seen them come in, though he was at the other end of the room; he had watched for them since the first note of the music struck; he had neglected the duty to which he had been specially appropriated, the duty of looking after and amusing and taking care of the two fair daughters of the Marchioness, who was as good as Lady Patroness of Mrs. Burton's ball. To keep up the proper contrast, I am aware that Lady Edith and Lady Florizel should have been young women of a certain age, uninviting, and highly aristocratic, while Norah Drummond had all the beauty and sweetness, as well as poverty and lowliness, to recommend her; but this, I am sorry to confess, was not the case. The Ladies Merewether were very pretty girls, as pretty as Norah; they were not "stuck-up," but as pleasant and as sweet as English girls need be—indeed, except that they were not Norah,

I know no fault they had in Ned's eyes. But they were not Norah, and he forsook his post. Nobody noticed the fact much except Mrs. Burton. As for Lady Florizel, she had the most unfeigned good-humoured contempt for Ned. He was a mere boy, she said; she had no objection to dance with him, or chatter to him; but she had in her reach two hundred as good, or better, than him, and she preferred men to boys, she did not hesitate to say. So that when Ned appeared by Norah's side, Lady Florizel, taking her place with her partner, smiled upon him as he passed, and asked audibly, "Oh, who was that pretty girl with Mr. Burton? oh, how pretty she was! Couldn't anybody tell her?" Lady Florizel was not offended. But Mrs. Burton saw, and was wroth.

Many changes had happened in those six years. At the time of the trial and after it there had been many doubts and speculations in Helen's mind as to what she should do. Suspecting her cousin as she did, and with Robert's judgment against him, as recorded in that last mournful letter, how was she to go on accepting a shelter from her cousin, living at his very gates in a sort of dependence upon him? But she had nowhere else to go, for one thing, and the shade of additional doubt which had been thrown upon Burton by the trial, was not of a kind to impress her mind; nothing had been brought forward against him, no one had said openly that he was to blame, and Helen was discouraged when it all ended in nothing as she thought, and had not energy enough to uproot herself from the peaceful corner she had taken refuge in. Where could she go? Then she had the Haldanes to keep her to this spot, which now seemed the only spot in the world where pity and friendship were to be found. Stephen, whom she contemplated with a certain reverence in his great suffering and patience, was the better for her presence and that of Norah, and their kind eyes and the voices that bade her welcome whenever she crossed their threshold was a comfort to her. She kept herself apart from the Burtons for a long time, having next to no intercourse with them, and so she would have done still had the matter been in her hands. But the matter was no longer in her hands. The children had grown up, all of them together. They had grown into those habits which fathers and mothers cannot cross, which insensibly affect even their own feelings and relations. Clara Burton and Norah Drummond were cousins still, though so far at a gulf of feeling lay between their two houses. Both of them

had been, as it were, brought up with the Daltons at the Rectory. They were all children together, all boys and girls together. Insensibly the links multiplied, the connection grew stronger. When Ned Burton was at Dura there was never a day in his life that he did not spend, or attempt to spend, part of it in the Gatehouse. And Clara ran in and out—she and Mary Dalton; they were all about the same age; at this moment they ranged from twenty to seventeen, a group of companions more intimate than anything but youth, and this long and close association could have made them. They were like brothers and sisters, Mrs. Dalton said anxiously, veiling from herself the fact that some of them perhaps had begun to feel and think as brothers and sisters do not feel. Charlie Dalton, for instance, who was the eldest of all—one-and-twenty—instead of falling in love with Norah, who was as poor as himself—a thing which would have been simple madness, of course, but not so bad as what had happened—had seen fit to go and bestow his heart upon Clara Burton, whose father dreamed of nothing less than a duke for her, and who had not as much heart as would lie on a sixpence, the rector's wife said indignantly; and Heaven knows how many other complications were foreshadowing through those family intimacies, and the brother and sister condition which had been so delightful while it lasted. Mrs. Drummond and Mrs. Dalton went together on this particular evening watching from a distance over their respective children. Helen's face was calm, for Norah was in no trouble; but the rector's wife had a pucker on her brow. She could see her Charlie watching so wistfully the movements of Clara Burton through the crowd, hanging about her, stealing to her side whenever he could, following her everywhere with his eyes. Charlie was especially dear to his mother, as the eldest boy of a large family, when he is a good boy, so often is. She had been able to talk to him many a day about her domestic troubles when she could not speak to his father. She had felt herself strengthened by his sympathy and support, that backing up which is so good for everybody, and it broke her heart to see her boy breaking his for *that* girl. What could he see in her? the mother thought. If it had been Norah Drummond! and then she tried to talk to her friend at her side. They had come to be very fast friends; they had leant upon each other by turns, corners, as it were, of the burdens which each had to bear, and Mrs. Dalton knew

Mrs. Drummond could guess what the sigh meant which she could not restrain.

"How nice Norah is looking," she said, "and how happy! I think she has changed so much since she was a child. She used to have such a dreamy look; but now there is no *arrière pensée*, she goes in to everything with all her heart."

"Yes," said Helen; but she did not go on talking of Norah, she understood the give and take of sympathy. "I like Mary's dress so much. She and Katie look so fresh, and simple, and sweet. But they are not such novices as Norah; you know it is her first ball."

"Poor children, how excited it makes them! but dressing them is a dreadful business," said Mrs. Dalton with her anxious look still following her Charlie among all the changing groups. "I need not disguise it from you, dear, who know all about us. It was sometimes hard enough before, and now what with evening dresses! And when they come to a dance like this they want something pretty and fresh. You will feel it by-and-by even with Norah. I am sure if it were not for the cheap shops, where you can buy tarlatan for so little, and making them up ourselves at home, I never could do it. And you know whatever sacrifices one makes, one cannot refuse a little pleasure to one's children. Poor things, it is all they are likely to have."

"At least they are getting the good of it," said Helen. Norah's dress was the first task of this kind that had been put upon her, and she had been forced to make her sacrifices to dress the child who had grown a woman; but Helen, too, knew that she could not buy many ball dresses off her hundred a year. And it was so strange to think such thoughts in this lavish extravagant house, where every magnificence that could be thought of adorned mother and daughter, and the room and the walls. Mrs. Dalton answered to the thought before it had been expressed.

"It is curious," she said, "there is Clara Burton, who might dress in cloth of gold if she liked—but our girls look just as well. What a thing it is to be rich!—for the Burtons you know are—" Here Mrs. Dalton stopped abruptly, remembering that if the Burtons were nobodies, so was also the friend at her side. She herself was connected with the old Harcourts, and had a right to speak.

"Now, ladies, I know what you are doing," said Mr. Burton, suddenly coming up to them; "you are saying all sorts of sweet things to each other about your children, and

privately you are thinking that there is nobody in the room fit to be seen except your own. Oh don't look so caught! I know, because I am doing the same thing myself."

Doing the same thing himself—comparing his child to my Norah—to my Mary, the ladies inwardly replied; but no such answer was made aloud. "We were saying how they all enjoy themselves," said Mrs. Dalton, "that was all."

Mr. Burton laughed that little laugh of mockery which men of vulgar minds indulge in when they talk to women, and which is as much as to say, you can't take me in with your pretences, *I* see through you. He had grown stouter, but he did not look so vigorous as of old. He was fleshy, there was a furtive look in his eye. When he glanced round him at the brilliant party, and all the splendour of which he was the owner, it was not with the complacency of old. He looked as if at any moment something disagreeable, something to be avoided might appear before him, and had acquired a way of stretching out his neck as if to see who was coming behind. The thing in the room about which he was most complacent was Clara. She had grown up, straight, and large, and tall in stature, like our Anglo-Saxon queen with masses of white rosy flesh and gold-coloured hair. The solid splendid white arm, laden with bracelets, which leaned on her partner's shoulder, was a beauty not possessed by any of the slight girls whose mothers were watching her as she moved past them. Clara's arm would have made two of Norah's. Her size and fulness and colour dazzled everybody. She was a full-blown Rubens beauty, of the class which has superseded the gentler, pensive, unobtrusive heroine in these days. "I don't pretend to say anything but what I think," said Mr. Burton, "and I do feel that *that* is a girl to be proud of. Don't dance too much, Clary, you have got to ride with me to-morrow." She gave him a smile and a nod as she whirled past. The man who was dancing with her was dark, a perfect contrast to her brilliant beauty. "They make a capital couple," Mr. Burton said with a suppressed laugh. "I suppose a prophet, if we had one, would see a good many combinations coming on in an evening like this. Why, by Jove, here's Ned."

And it was Ned, bringing Norah back to her mother. "I thought you had been dancing with one of—" said his father, pointing with his thumb across his shoulder. "Have you no manners, boy? Norah, I am

sure, will excuse you when she knows you are engaged—people that are stopping in the house."

"Oh, of course I will excuse him," said Norah. "I did not want him at all. I would rather sit quiet a little and see everybody. And Charlie has promised to dance with me. I suppose it was not wrong to ask Charlie, was it? He might as well have me as any one, don't you think, mamma?"

"If you take to inviting gentlemen, Norah, I shall expect you to ask me," said Mr. Burton, who was always jocular to girls. Norah looked at him with her bright observant eyes. She always looked at him, he thought, in that way. He was half afraid of her, though she was so young. He had even tried to conciliate her, but he had not succeeded. She shook her head without making any reply, and just then something happened which made a change in all the circumstances. It was the approach of the man with whom Clara had been dancing; a man with the air of a hero of romance; bearded, with very fine dark eyes and hair that curled high like a crest upon his head. Norah gave a little start as he approached, and blushed. "It is the hero," she said to herself. He looked as if he had just walked out of a novel with every sign of his character legibly set forth. But though it may be very well to gibe at beautiful dark eyes and handsome features, it is difficult to remain unmoved by their influence. Norah owned with that sudden flush of colour a certain curiosity, to say the least of it. Mr. Burton frowned, and so did his son and daughter simultaneously, as if by touching of a spring.

"I am afraid you don't remember me, Mrs. Drummond," the stranger said; "but I recollect you so very well that I hope you will let me introduce myself—Cyril Rivers. It is a long time since we met."

"Oh, I remember!" cried impulsive Norah, and then was silent, blushing more deeply than ever. To ask Charlie Dalton to dance with her was one thing, but meeting the hero was entirely different. It took away her breath.

And two minutes after she was dancing with him. It was this he had come to her mother for—not asking any one to introduce him. He was no longer a boy, but a man travelled and experienced, who knew, or thought he knew, society and the world. But he had not yet dismissed from his mind that past episode—an episode which had been fixed and deepened in his memory by the trial and all the discussions in the news

papers. To say that he had continued to think about the Drummonds would have been foolish; but when he came back to Dura to visit the Burtons, they were the first people who recurred to his mind. As his host drove him past the Gatehouse on the night of his arrival, he had asked about them. And Mr. Burton remembered this now, and did not like it. He stood and looked after the pair as they went away arm-in-arm. Norah did not answer as Clara did as a complete foil and counter to Mr. Rivers's dark handsomeness. It was a mistake altogether. It was Clara who should have been with him, who was his natural companion. Mr. Burton reflected that nothing but kindness could have induced him to invite his cousin's penniless girl to the great ball at which Clara made her *début* in the world as well as Norah. He felt as he stood and looked on that it was a mistake to have done it. People so poor and so lowly ought not to be encouraged to set themselves up as equals of the richer classes. He said to himself that his system had been wrong. Different classes had different duties, he felt sure. His own was to get as much of the good things of this world, as much luxury and honour as he could have for his money. Helen's was to subsist on a hundred a year; and to expect of her that she could anyhow manage to buy ball dresses, and put her child in competition with his! It was wrong; there was no other word. Mr. Burton left his neighbours, and went off with a dissatisfied countenance to another part of the room. It was his own fault.

"I should have known you anywhere," said Mr. Rivers in the pause of the waltzing. "You were only a child when I saw you last, but I should have known you anywhere."

"Should you? How very strange! What a good memory you must have!" said Norah. "Though, indeed, as soon as you said who you were, I remembered you."

"But nobody told me who you were," he said, "when I saw you just now, dancing with that young fellow, the son of the house."

"Did you see us then?"

"Yes, and your mother sitting by that stand of flowers. You are half yourself as I remember you, and half her."

"What a good memory you must have!" said Norah, very incredulous; and then they floated away again to the soft dreamy music, he supporting her, guiding her through the moving crowd as Norah had never dreamt of being guided. She had felt she was on her own responsibility when dancing with Ned and Charlie; with, indeed, a little share of re-

sponsibility on account of her partners too. But Mr. Rivers danced beautifully, and Norah felt like a cloud, like a leaf lightly carried by the breeze. She was carried along without any trouble to herself. When they had stopped, instead of feeling out of breath, she stopped only from courtesy's sake, to let the others go on.

"How well you dance, Mr. Rivers!" she cried. "I never liked a waltz so much before. The boys are so different. One never feels sure where one is going. I like it now."

"Then you must let me have as many waltzes as you can," he said, "and I shall like it too. Who are the boys? You have not any—brothers? Boys are not to be trusted for waltzing; they are too energetic—too much determined to have everything their own way."

"Oh, the boys! they are chiefly Ned and—Charlie Dalton. They are the ones I always dance with," said Norah. "And oh, by-the-bye, I was engaged to Charlie for this dance."

"How clever of me to carry you off before Mr. Charlie came!" said the hero. "But it is his own fault if he was not up in time."

"Oh, I don't know," said Norah, with a blush. "The fact is—he did not ask me; I asked him. I never was at a ball before, and I don't know many people, and of course I wanted to dance. I asked him to take me if he was not engaged, so if he found any one he liked better, he was not to be blamed if he forgot. Why do you laugh? Was it a silly thing to do?"

"I don't know Charlie," said Mr. Rivers; "but I should punch his head with pleasure. What has he done that he should have you asking him to dance?"

And then that came again which was not dancing, as Norah understood it, an occasion which had always called for considerable exertion, but a very dream of delightful movement, like flying, like—she could not tell what. By this time she was a little ashamed about Charlie; and the waltz put it out of Mr. Rivers's mind.

"Do you think I may call to-morrow?" he said, when they stopped again. "Will your mother let me? There are so many things I should like to talk over with her. You are too young, of course, to remember anything about a certain horrid bank."

"Ah, no, I am not too young," said Norah, and the smiles with which she had been looking up at him suddenly vanished from her face.

"I beg your pardon. I had forgotten

that it was of more importance to you than to any one. I want to talk to your mother about that. Do you think I may come? Look here; is this Charlie? He is just the sort of youth whom a young lady might ask to dance with her. And, good heavens, how he waltzes! I don't wonder that you felt it a painful exercise. Are Miss Burton and her guests friends?"

"We are all great friends," said Norah, half displeased. And Clara Burton as she passed gave her an angry look. "Why Clara is cross," she said pathetically. "What can I have done?"

Mr. Rivers laughed. Norah did not like the laugh; it seemed a little like Mr. Burton's. There was a certain conscious superiority and sense of having found some one out in it, which she did not either like or understand.

"You seem to know something I don't know," she said, with prompt indignation. "Perhaps why Clara is cross; but you don't know Clara. You don't know any of us, Mr. Rivers, and you oughtn't to look as if you had found us out. How could you find out all about us, who have known each other from babies, in one night?"

"I beg your pardon," he said, with an immediate change of tone. "It is one of the bad habits of society that nobody can depend on another, and everybody likes to grin at his neighbours. Forgive me; I forgot I was in a purer air."

"Oh, it was not that," said Norah, a little confused. He seemed to say things (she thought) which meant nothing, as if there was a great deal in them. She was glad to be taken back to her mother, and deposited under her shelter; but she was not permitted to rest there. Ned came and glowered at her reproachfully, as she sat down, and other candidates for her hand arrived so fast that the child was half intoxicated with pleasure and flattery. "What do they want *me* for?" she wondered within herself. She was so much in request that Ned did not get another dance till the very end of the evening: and even Mr. Rivers was balked in at least one of the waltzes he had engaged her for. He drew back with a smile, seeing it was Mr. Burton himself who was exerting himself to find partners for Norah. But Norah was all smiles; she danced the whole evening, coming little by little into her partner's way. Pleased to be so popular, delighted with everybody's "kindness" to her, and dazzled with this first opening glimpse of "the world."

"If this is the world, I like it," she said to her mother as they drove home. "It is delightful; it is beautiful; it is so kind! Oh, mamma, is it wrong to feel so? I never was so happy in my life."

"No, my darling, it is not wrong," Helen said, kissing her. She was not insensible to her child's triumph.



PART IX

CHAPTER XXVI.



It is vanity, my dear, vanity. You must not set your mind upon it," said Mrs. Haldane.

"Oh, but it was delightful," said Norah, "it was wonderful! if you had been there yourself you would have liked it as much as I did. Every-

body looked so nice, and everybody *was* so nice, Mrs. Haldane. A thing that makes every one kind and pleasant and smiling must be good, don't you think so? We were all as amiable, as charming, as fascinating as ever we could be."

"And whom did you dance with?" said Miss Jane.

"I danced with everybody. It is quite true. You cannot think how kind the people were. When we went in first," said Norah, with a laugh and a blush, "I saw so many strange faces, I was afraid I should have no dancing at all; so I whispered to Charlie Dalton, 'Do take me out for the next dance, Charlie!' and he nodded to say yes. I suppose it was dreadfully wrong and ignorant; but I did so want to have a good dance!"

"Well, then, that is one," said practical Miss Jane, beginning to count on her fingers.

"Oh, no! it is not one at all. Mr. Rivers came and asked me, and I forgot all about Charlie. He forgot too, I suppose; for I did not dance with him the whole evening. And then there was Ned, and young Mr. Howard, and Captain Douglas, and Mrs. Dalton's brother, and—I told you, everybody; and, to be very grand, Lord Merewether himself at the end."

"Lord Merewether!" Miss Jane was

deeply impressed, and held the finger on which she had counted this potentate for a full minute. "Then, Norah, my dear, you had the very best of the great county folks."

"Yes," said Norah, "it was very nice; only he was a little—stupid. And then Ned again, and Mr. Rivers; Mr. Rivers was always coming; mamma made me say I was engaged. It did not turn out to be a fib, for some gentleman always came to ask me; but one always shows it in one's face when one says a thing that is not quite true."

"Oh, Norah!" said Mrs. Haldane, "is not that just what I told you? Do you think anything can be good or right for a young girl in a Christian land that makes you say what is not quite true? There may be no harm in the dancing by itself, though in my day we were of a different way of thinking; but to tell—lies——"

"Not lies, mother," said Stephen. "When Norah told Mr. Rivers she was engaged, he understood, of course, that she did not want to dance with him."

"Well," said Norah slowly, "I don't know. To tell the very, very truth, I did want very much to dance with him. He dances like an angel—at least, I don't know how an angel dances—Oh, please don't look so shocked, Mrs. Haldane; I did not mean any harm. He is just simply delightful to dance with. But mamma thought something—I don't know what. It is etiquette, you know; a girl must not dance very often with one man."

"And who is this Mr. Rivers?" said Stephen. "Is he as delightful in other ways?"

"Don't you remember?" said Norah. "It is so funny nobody seems to remember but me. When we came here first, he was here too, and mamma and I met him one day at our own old home in London. Mr. Stephen, I am sure I have told you; the boy, I used to call him, that was on our side."

"Ah, I remember now," said Stephen; "and he seems to be on your side still, from what you say. But who is he, Norah, and what is he, and why did he want to dance so often with you?"

"As for that," said Norah, laughing, "I suppose he liked me too; there was not any other reason. He is so handsome!—just exactly like the hero in a novel. The moment I saw him I said to myself, 'Here is the hero.' He is almost too handsome: dark, with hair

that curls all over his head, and the most beautiful dark eyes. You never saw such beautiful eyes! Oh, I am not speaking because I like him. I think I should almost like him better if he was not quite so—don't you know? If I were writing a novel, I should take him for the hero. I should make everybody fall in love with him—all the ladies, one after another. When one sees a man like that in real life," said Norah, with gravity, "it puts one directly on one's guard."

"Are you on your guard, Norah?" said Stephen, with a smile. The incipient fun in his eyes was, however, softened by a tender alarm, a wistful curiosity. The child! Since poor Drummond used to call her so, regarding her as the child *par excellence*—the type and crown of childhood—this was the name that had seemed most appropriate to Norah. And it meant so much—not only Robert's child, who was gone, and had left her to the love of his friends, but the very embodiment of youth and innocence—the fresh, new life, to be made something better of than any of the older lives had been. Should she, too, fall just into the common snare—just into the vulgar pitfalls, as everybody did? The thought disturbed her self-appointed guardian—her father's friend.

"Me!" said Norah, and her colour rose, and she laughed, with a light in her eyes which had not been there before. It was not the glance of rising excitement, as Stephen feared, but only a merry glow of youthful temerity—that daring which loves to anticipate danger. "Oh, what fun it would be! But no, Mr. Stephen; oh, no! that was not what I meant in the least. I am not that sort of girl. Mr. Rivers," she added, with a certain solemnity, "had something to do with that bank, you know. I don't know what he had to do with it. He is Lord Rivers's son, and it is to talk over that that he is coming to see mamma."

"Oh, to talk over that!" said Stephen, half amused.

"Yes, to talk it over," said Norah, with great gravity; and then she made a sudden leap from the subject. "The Merewethers are all staying at the great house—the marchioness herself, and Lord Merewether, and the girls; I think they are very nice girls. But, oh! Miss Jane, I must tell you one thing; she had on her diamonds. I never saw diamonds before. They are like light. They change, and they glimmer, and they make little rainbows. I never saw anything so beautiful! They are like a quantity of dewdrops when the sun is shining—

only you never could get dewdrops to keep still in one place."

"And I suppose they are worth a mint of money," said Miss Jane, with a sigh of admiration. "I have never seen them but in the shops, Norah; but I don't think I should like to wear as much as would keep half-a-dozen poor families round my neck."

Norah paused doubtfully, not feeling equal to this question.

"I suppose they belong to the family, and she dare not sell them, and then, perhaps—Would God have made diamonds if He did not mean people to wear them?" she asked, with hesitation. "Oh, do you know, I think I should like so much to wear them, if they were mine!"

"Ah, my dear," said old Mrs. Haldane, "see how vanity comes into the mind. Yesterday you had never thought of diamonds; now you would like—you know you would like—to have them; and from that to trying to get them is but a step, Norah, but a step—if you don't mind."

"I could only try to get them by stealing them," said Norah; "and, after all, I don't care so much as that. Besides, girls don't wear diamonds. But I'll tell you what I should like. I should like to take those lovely things of the marchioness's, and put them upon mamma."

"There, I told you!" said the old lady. "Norah, don't go to these places any more. You have begun to covet them in your heart."

"Oh, how beautiful mamma would look in them!" cried Norah. "Mr. Stephen, is it vanity to admire one's mother? I suppose it must be really; for if there is anything in the world that belongs to you, of course it is your mother. I think mamma is beautiful: even in her black silk, made square, and not so fresh as it once was, she was the most beautiful in the room—I don't mean pretty, like us girls. And if I could have put her into black velvet instead, with lovely lace, like Mrs. Burton's, and the marchioness's diamonds—oh!" cried Norah, expanding in her proud imagination, "she would have been like a queen!"

"Oh, Norah, Norah!" cried Mrs. Haldane, shaking her head.

"And so she would," said Stephen. "Norah is quite right."

He spoke low, and there was a melancholy tone in his voice. He was thinking sadly how she had been buried like himself in the middle of her days—shut out from all those triumphs and glories which are pleasant to a

woman. A less human-hearted man in Stephen Haldane's position would no doubt have pronounced it happy for Helen that she was thus preserved from vanity and vainglory. But he had learned to feel for all the deprivations of life. This was what he was really thinking, but not what he was supposed to think. Miss Jane gave a glance of her eye at him from her sewing, half-indignant, half-sorrowful. She had fancied something of the sort often, she said to herself. Stephen, poor Stephen! who could never have a wife, or any other love different from her own. She thought that the other woman whom she had admitted in all the confidence of friendship had stolen from him her brother's heart.

"Well, and if she had," said Miss Jane, with some sharpness, "what good would that have done her? I never heard that to be like a queen made anybody the happier yet."

"I was not thinking of what made her happier," said Norah, coming behind Miss Jane's chair, and stealing an arm round her neck, "but of what would make *me* happier. Shouldn't you like to have everything that was nice for Mrs. Haldane and Mr. Stephen, even if they didn't want it? Oh, I know you would! and so should I."

"You coaxing child! you would make one swear black was white! What has that to do with lace and diamonds?" said Miss Jane; but she was vanquished, and had no more to say.

"Mary and Katie were in white tarletane," said Norah. "They looked so pretty! Clara looked very much the same. You can't have much better than fresh white tarletane, you know; only she had the most beautiful silk underneath, and heaps of ornaments. She is so big she can stand a great deal of decoration; but it would not have done for any of us little things. How anxious I used to be to grow big!" Norah went on. "Now, on the whole, I think it is best not; one does not take up so much room; one does not require so much stuff for a dress; one can do without a great many things. If I had been as big as Clara, now, for instance, I never could have done with those little bits of bracelets and mamma's one string of pearls."

"So you see good comes from evil," said Stephen, with a smile.

"Oh, Stephen, don't talk so to encourage the child! With your upbringing, Norah, and with all the advantages you have had, to give up your mind to such follies! If I were your poor mamma——"

"She is saying nothing wrong, mother," said Miss Jane. "It *is* a great gain to Norah, you know, that she is little, and can get a pretty dress out of twelve yards of stuff, when Clara Burton takes twenty. That is thrift, and not vanity. I am very glad you are little, Norah; big women are always in the way. That Clara Burton, for instance—if she were in a small house she would fill it all up; there would not be room for any one else. What does Mr. Rivers see in her, I wonder? She is not half so nice as some people I know."

"Mr. Rivers?" said Norah.

"Yes, my dear. They say it is almost a settled thing between the two families. She will have quantities of money, and he will be Lord Rivers when his father dies. They say that is why he is here."

It did not matter anything to Norah. She did not care; why should she? Her very admiration of him had been linked with a gibe. He was too handsome; he was a man out of a book. Nevertheless, she looked at Miss Jane for a moment aghast. "The boy that was on our side!" she said to herself.

"Who are *they*, and what do they know about it?" said Stephen. "People don't make such arrangements nowadays. If this were intended, you may be sure nothing at all would be said."

Stephen made this little speech partly out of a real regard for Norah's cheerfulness, which he thought was affected, and partly to rouse her to self-defence.

"But it would be quite nice," said Norah, recovering her dismay. "Oh, how funny it would be to think of one of us being married! It should be Clara the first; she is the youngest, but she is the biggest, and she was always the one who would be first, you know. She is very, very handsome, Miss Jane. You never were fond of Clara; that is why you don't see it. It would be the very thing!" cried Norah, clapping her hands. "She is not one of the girls that would go and make him vain, falling in love with him. She will keep him in his right place; she will not let him be the hero in the novel. The only thing is, I am a little disappointed—though it is very foolish and stupid; for of course all that is over long ago, and Clara is like my sister; and if Mr. Burton was wicked, I hope he has repented. But still, you know, I have always thought of Mr. Rivers as one that was on our side."

"Hush, child!" cried Miss Jane. "Don't be the one to keep up old quarrels. That is all over now, and we have no sides."

"So I suppose," said Norah; "but I feel a little as if he were a deserter. I wonder if Clara likes him. I wonder if—— It is all so very funny! One of us girls! But I must go now to mamma. Mr. Stephen, I will come back in the evening, and tell you what mamma thinks, and if Mr. Rivers had anything to tell her—that is, if he comes to-day."

And Norah ran away unceremoniously, without leave-taking. She was the child of both the households. Sometimes she went and came a dozen times in a day, carrying always a little stream of youth and life, and freshness into the stagnant places. Stephen laid down his book with a smile at the sight of her; he took it up now with a little sigh. He had sat there all these six years, a motionless, solemn figure, swept aside from the life of man, and Norah's comings and goings had been as sweet to him as if she had been his own child. Now he feared that a new chapter of life was opening, and it moved him vaguely, with an expectation which was mingled with pain; for any change must bring pain to him. To others there would be alternations—threads twisted of dark and bright, of good and evil; but to him in his chair by the window, no change, he felt, could bring anything but harm.

"Oh, mamma," said Norah, rushing into the drawing-room at the other side of the house, "fancy what I have just heard! They say it is all but settled that Clara is to marry Mr. Rivers. They say that is why he is here."

"It is very likely, dear," said Helen. "I thought something of that kind must be intended from what I saw last night."

"What did you see, mamma? How odd I should never have thought of it! I feel a little disappointed," said Norah; "because, you know, I always made up my mind that he was on our side."

"We don't want him on our side," said Mrs. Drummond, with a decision which surprised her daughter. "And, Norah, I am glad you have spoken to me. Be sure you don't forget this when you meet Mr. Rivers: he is very agreeable, and he seems very friendly; but you must take care never to say anything, or to let him say anything, that you would not wish Clara to hear."

Norah paused, and looked at her mother with considerable bewilderment. "How very strange of you to say this, mamma! How very disagreeable—never to say anything, nor let him say anything! But I should hate to have Clara or any one listening to

all I say. I will not talk to him at all. I will close my lips up tight, and never say a word. I suppose that will be best."

"Not to-day, however," said Mrs. Drummond; "for I see him coming, Norah. You must be as you always are—neither opening your mouth too much, nor closing it up too tight."

"I hate the *juste milieu*," said naughty Norah; but at that moment the door-bell rang, and, before she could speak again, Mr. Rivers was shown in, looking more like the hero of a novel than ever. He was tall, slender, well-proportioned. He had those curls about his temples which go to a girl's heart. He had the most ingratiating nose, the beautifullest eyes. "For one thing," said Norah to herself savagely, "Clara will not go and fall in love with him and make him vain!" Clara had too great an opinion of herself; she was not likely to be any man's worshipper. There was consolation in that.

"It is a long time since we met," Mr. Rivers said; "but you must pardon me for thrusting myself upon you all at once, Mrs. Drummond. I have never forgotten what passed when I saw you last. I doubt whether I ought to speak of it after all these years."

"Perhaps it is better not," said Helen.

"Perhaps; but I should like to say one thing—just one thing. I do not know if you thought my father to blame. He is a quiet man; he never makes any public appearance; he was a sufferer only. He had nothing to do with the bank. He was one of those who were wronged, not of those who did the wrong."

"I have always known that," said Mrs. Drummond; and then there was a pause. ("He is on our side still," Norah thought to herself; but her mother changed the subject abruptly.) "The children have all grown up since you were here. Time has made more change upon them than upon you."

"Do you think so?" said the hero. "I am not sure. Time has made a great deal of difference in me. I am not half so sure of the satisfactoriness of life and the good qualities of the world as I used to be. I suppose it is a sign that age is coming on; whereas these young people, these fairy princes and princesses, who were babies when I was here——"

At this point Norah was seized with one of those irrestrainable, seductive laughs which lead the spirit astray. "Oh, I beg your pardon," she said; "but I was puzzled to think how poor dear Ned could be a fair

prince! He is such a dear fellow, and I am so fond of him; but Prince Charmant, mamma!"

"If he is a dear fellow, and you are fond of him, I should think it did not matter much whether he looked like Prince Charmant or not," said Mr. Rivers; and then he added, with a smile—"There are other kinds of princes besides Charmant. Riquet, with the tuft, for instance; and he with the long nose——"

Now Ned, poor fellow, had a long nose. He had not grown up handsome, and Norah was strongly conscious of the fact. She felt that she had been the first to laugh at him, and yet she hated this stranger for following her example. She grew very red, and drew herself up with the air of an offended queen.

"They all got *charmant* at the last," she said stiffly; "that is better than beginning by being *charmant*, and turning out very disagreeable in the end."

Mrs. Drummond gave her daughter a warning glance. "It was a pretty party last night," she said; "I hope you liked it. We thought it very grand; we have so little gaiety here."

"Was it gaiety?" said the young man. "I suppose it was; but a ball is always rather a solemn affair to me, especially when you are staying in the house. The horror that comes over you lest you have danced with some one you ought not to have danced with, or left some one whom you ought. I broke away for a little while last night when I saw you, and went in for simple pleasure—but duty always drags one back at the end."

"Duty at a ball! Why it is all pleasure," cried Norah. "It may be foolish and frivolous, or it may even be—wrong; but I never was so happy in my life."

Then the hero of romance turned upon her, and smiled. "You told me it was your first ball," he said; "and that, I suppose, would naturally make it look like Paradise."

"It was very nice," said Norah. His smile and his look drove her back into the shelter of commonplace. Somehow when he looked at her, her energy seemed to turn into exaggeration, and her natural fervour into pretence. Then she plunged into the heart of a new subject with all a child's temerity. "Don't you think Clara is very handsome?" she said.

Mr. Rivers did not shrink from a reply. "She is very handsome—if she knew how to dress."

"Dress! why, she had the loveliest dress——"

"It was all white and puffy—like yours," he said. "Fancy that girl having no more perception than to dress herself like you! What has she to do with shadows, and clouds, and mystery? She should be in heavy silks or satins, like the Juno she is."

Norah did not quite make out what this meant; whether it was the highest admiration or a covert sneer. She took it for granted it must be the former. "Yes; I know she is like a Juno," she said, somewhat doubtfully; adding, with a slightly faltering tone, "and she is very nice too."

"She is your cousin, Norah," said Mrs. Drummond quietly; and then the child grew redder than ever, and felt herself put on her defence.

"I did not mean to gossip, mamma. I don't know what Mr. Rivers likes to talk about. When any one is quite a stranger, how can you tell, unless you are very, very clever, what to talk about? And then I have been with Mr. Stephen, telling them all about the ball. It is in my head. I can't think of anything else. How pretty the Merewether girls are! Oh, I beg your pardon. I did not mean to go back to the same subject. But I had to tell *them* everything—what people were there, and whom I danced with, and——"

"Mr. Stephen always encourages your chatter," said Helen, with a smile.

"What a sensible man Mr. Stephen must be! May I know who he is?" said young Rivers; and thus a new topic presented itself. Stephen Haldane's name and his story brought up an unintentional reference to the misfortunes which linked the two households together, and which had given Cyril Rivers a certain hold upon them. When this chance was afforded him, he told them, very simply and shortly, what sacrifices his father had made; how he had mortgaged some of his property, and sold some, and was living very quietly now, in retirement, till his children were all educated. "I am sent out into the world, to see how it looks after the waters have abated," he said, laughing. "I have got to find out how the land lies, and if there is any green showing above the flood; but I don't know whether I am most likely to turn out the raven or the dove."

"Oh, I should like to find an olive leaf for you to fly back with!" said Norah, obeying her first impulse, in her foolish way. Mrs. Drummond looked at him very gravely, without any of her daughter's enthusiasm.

"Mr. Rivers must find the olive leaf in some warmer corner," she said. "They don't grow in our garden, Norah. We have none to give."

"That is true," said the heedless girl; "but, if the olive would do, Mr. Rivers, there is one in the conservatory at the great house—a poor, little, wee, stunted thing; but there is one, I know."

Did she mean it? or was it mere innocence, heedlessness? It was not wonderful if Cyril Rivers was puzzled, for even Mrs. Drummond could not make quite sure.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It was natural that there should be nothing talked about that morning throughout Dura except the ball. All the young people were late of getting up, and they were all full of the one subject—how this one and that one looked; how Charlie haunted Clara all the evening; how young Mr. Nicholas, the curate, whom decorum kept from waltzing, stood mournfully and gazed at Mary Dalton through all the round dances. Things were getting very serious between Mary and Mr. Nicholas; though waltzing was such a temptation to her, poor child, and though she had plenty of partners, she sat still half the evening out of pity for the curate's wistful eyes; and yet he had been ungrateful all the same, and reproachful on the way home. Katie Dalton, to her own great comfort, was still quite loverless and hampered by nobody's looks. "I would not put up with it," she said to her sister; "because a man chooses to make himself disagreeable, can you not be allowed to enjoy yourself? It is not so often we have a dance. I should let him know very plainly, if it were me."

"Oh, Katie dear," said her sister, "you don't know what you would do if it were you."

"Well, then, I am very glad it isn't me. I hate parsons!" cried Katie. This was but a specimen of the commotion made by the ball. The sudden incursion of quantities of new people into the limited little society in which everybody had appropriated a companion to his or herself was at the first outset as disagreeable as it was bewildering. The Dura boys and girls had each a sore point somewhere. They had each some reproaches to make, if not audibly, yet in their hearts. Norah and Katie, who were quite fancy-free, were the only ones who had received no wound. At the moment when Mr. Rivers sat in the drawing-room at the Gatehouse, Ned and Clara Burton were

walking down the avenue together, discussing the same subject. They were both of them somewhat sulky; and both with the same person. It was Norah who had affronted both the brother and sister; and to Clara, at least, the affront was doubly bitter, from her consciousness of the fact that, but for the kindness, nay, charity, of the Burtons, Norah never could have come into such a scene of splendour at all. Clara was her father's child, and this was a thing which she never forgot.

"I have never been so fond of Norah Drummond as the rest of you were," she said. "I think she is a heartless little thing. I am sure what she and her mother want is to be revenged on us because we are so much better off. I am sure papa thinks so. It is the shabbiest, the most wretched thing in the world, to hate people because they are better off."

"Trust to you girls for imputing bad motives," said Ned. He was very sulky, and rather unhappy, and consequently ready to quarrel with his best friend. In his heart he had no such bad opinion of "girls;" but at this moment he felt that nothing was too disagreeable to be said.

"We girls know better what we are about a great deal than you do," said Clara. "We see through things. Now that you begin to have your eyes opened about Norah Drummond, I may speak. She is a dreadful little flirt. I have seen it before, though you never did. Why, I have seen her even with Mr. Nicholas; and she asked Charlie Dalton to dance with her last night—asked him! Would any girl do that who had a respect for herself, or cared for what people think?"

"Did Charlie tell you?" said Ned with deeper wrath and wretchedness still. "She never asked me," he said to himself; though he would have been ready to dance himself half dead in her service had she but taken the trouble to ask.

"I heard her," said Clara; "and then, as soon as something better came, she forgot all about Charlie. She made Cyril Rivers dance with her, claiming acquaintance because she met him once when we were all little. Ned, I would never think of that girl more, if I were you. In the first place, you know it never could come to anything. Papa would not allow it—a girl without a penny, without any position even, and all that dreadful story about her father!"

"The less we say of that dreadful story the better," said Ned.

"Why? We have nothing to do with it—except that papa has been so very kind. I

don't think it is wise to have poor relations near," said Clara. "You are obliged to take some notice of them; and they always hate you, and try to come in your way. I know mamma was quite wild to see you, the very first thing—before you had danced with Lady Florizel, or any one—taking Norah out."

"Mamma is too sensible to think anything about it," said Ned.

"You may suppose so, but I know to the contrary. Mamma was very anxious you should be attentive to Lady Florizel. We are rich, but we have not any connections to speak of; only rich people, like poor grandpapa. I don't mean to say I am not very fond of grandpapa; but the exhibition he always makes of himself at those meetings and things, and the way he throws his money away—money that he ought to be saving up for us. Papa says so, Ned! Why should you look so fierce at me?"

"Because it is odious to hear you," said Ned. "You have no right to repeat what papa says—if papa does say such things. I hope my grandfather will do exactly what he likes with his money. I am sure he has the best right."

"Oh, that is all very well," said Clara. "I never had college debts to be paid. It suits you to be so independent, but it is chiefly you that the rest of us are thinking of. You know we have no connections, Ned. Grandpapa and his Dissenters are enough to make one ill. If he had only been philanthropic, one would not have minded so much; but fancy having, every month or two, Mr. Truston from the chapel to dinner! So you are bound to make a high marriage when you marry."

"I wish, Clara, you would talk of things you understand. I marry—is it likely?" said Ned.

"Very likely—if you ask Lady Florizel. Papa would not ask you to go into the business, or anything. Oh, I know! He does not say much about his plans, but he cannot hide a great deal from me. But you spoil it all, Ned," said Clara severely. "You put everything wrong, and make your own people your enemies. Instead of seeing how nice and how sweet and how charming the right young lady is, you go and throw yourself away on Norah Drummond—who leaves you in the lurch the moment she sees some one else better worth her pains."

"And who might that be?" asked Ned. He tried to laugh, poor fellow, but his laugh and his voice were both unsteady. There was truth in it all; that was what made

him so tremulous with anger and suppressed passion.

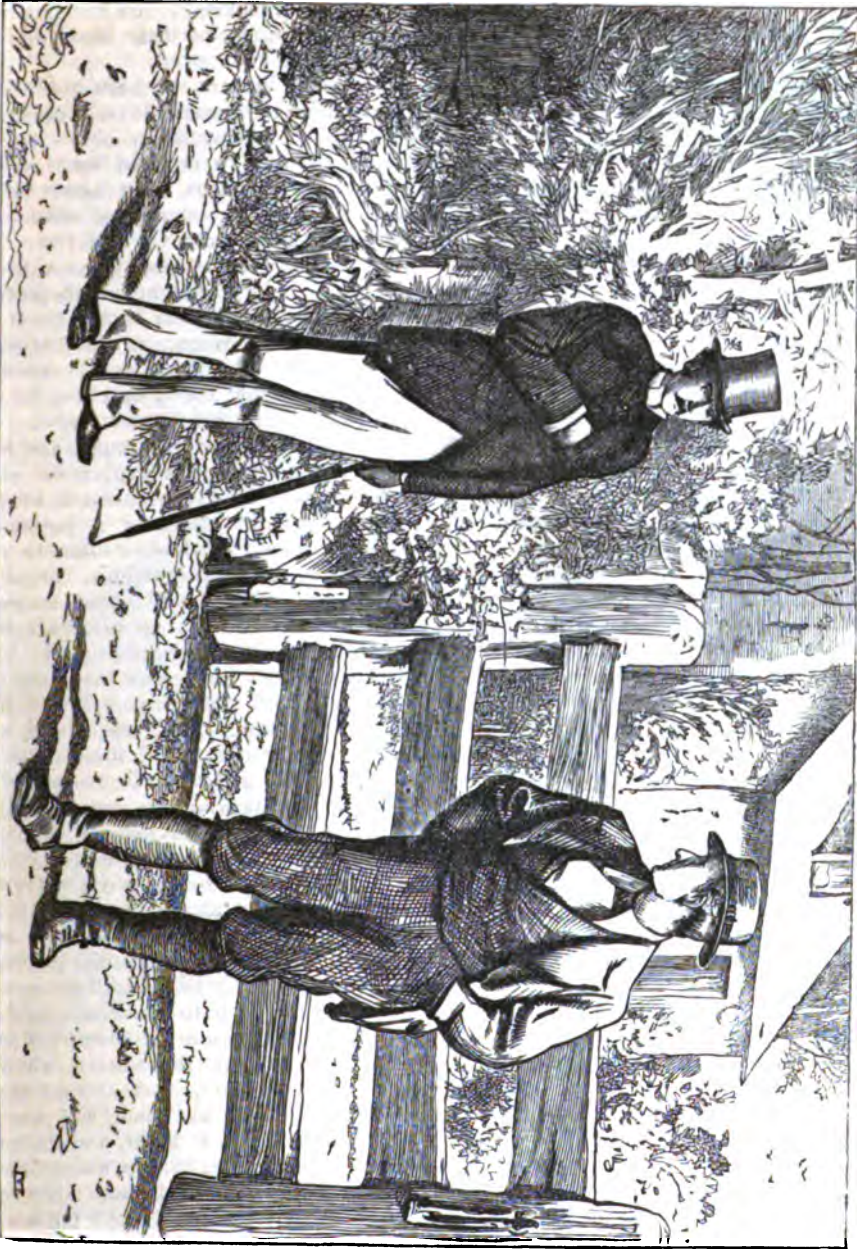
"As if you could not see for yourself," said Clara, herself flushing with indignation. "Why, Cyril Rivers, of course. No doubt they had decided he was the best man to pitch upon. Lord Merewether was too grand; they could not venture upon him—and the marchioness was there to take care of her son. But poor Cyril had nobody to take care of him. I saw Mrs. Drummond look at him in her languid way. She has some magnetism about her, that woman. I have seen her look at people before, and gradually something drew them that they had to go and talk to her. That was how it was last night. Of course, Norah thought no more of you. She had bigger game. She knew very well, if things changed, and Cyril Rivers escaped from her, that, so far as you were concerned, she had only to hold out a finger."

"You don't seem to make very much of me," said Ned with an angry blush.

"No, I should not make much of—any boy," said Clara calmly. "What could you do? You would fall into the net directly. You are such a simpleton, such a baby, that, of course, Norah would not need even to take any trouble. If she only held up her finger——"

"That is what you mean to do to Charlie, I suppose?" said Ned, with concentrated brotherly malice; and then it was Clara's turn to flush crimson, not so much with shame as with anger. Her complexion was so beautiful, her white so white, and her red so rosy, that the deeper colour which flushed all over her face in a moment seemed to dye the wavy, downy, velvety surface. Her blue eyes flashed out, deepening in colour like the sea under the wind.

"What does it matter to you what I mean to do?" she cried, and turned her back upon him in her wrath, and went back again up the avenue without a word of warning. Ned, in his surprise, stood and looked after her. She was like a Juno, as Mr. Rivers had said. She was the youngest of the whole band; but yet the great scale on which she was formed, her imperious manner and looks, gave her a certain command among them. The others were pretty girls; but Clara was splendid, and a woman. She had to be judged on a different standard. Poor Ned's heart was very sore; he was very angry, and wounded, and unhappy; and yet he recognised the difference as he stood and looked after his sister. It was natural that she should make up her mind to marry who



"JUST AM NED KIVVING THE FOLK GOING OUT. MR. GIVERS ENTERED THE CATS COMING BACK."—(See Page 134.)

soever pleased her—and break a heart as she would cast away a flower. There was nothing out of character in the superior tone she had taken with her elder brother. On the contrary, it was natural to her; and as for Norah, poor little Norah, what would befall her should she come in the way of this queen? Ned went upon his own way down the village with a hankering in his heart which all Clara's worldly wisdom and all his wounded pride could not quite subdue. Norah had been unkind to him. She had danced with him but twice all that long evening. She had danced with everybody but him. He had seen her—was it a dozen times?—with Rivers—confound him! And then he wondered whether there was any truth in Clara's theory about Rivers. Had Mrs. Drummond herself fallen into that way of match-making which was natural to mothers? He breathed a little more freely when he presumed that it must be she, and she only, who was to blame, not Norah. He strolled on with his hands in his pockets, thinking if, perhaps, he could meet her, or see her at a window, or persuade Katie Dalton to fetch her; there was always a hundred chances of an accidental meeting in Dura. But he could not with his own sore heart and wounded temper go to the Gatehouse.

Just as Ned reached the lodge going out, Mr. Rivers entered the gates coming back. He had a condescending, friendly way of accosting Ned which the young fellow could not bear.

"Ah, going into the village?" he said. "I am glad to be able to assure you that nobody has suffered from last night."

"I didn't suppose they had. I am going to the post," said Ned, surly as a young bear.

"Don't let me detain you, in that case. The post is too important to wait for anything," Rivers said, stepping aside.

Ned looked at him, and would have liked to knock him down. He thought what an effeminate puppy the fellow was, what a curled darling—the sort of thing that girls admire and think very fine, and all men despise. In short, the feelings with which a washed-out young woman contemplates the creature who is recognised as "a gentleman's beauty" were a trifle to those which governed Ned. Such feelings, it would appear, must be natural. Ned despised the man for being handsome, and the women for thinking him so, with a virulence which no neglected maiden ever surpassed.

"Do you want me, Burton?" Mr. Rivers said pleasantly, seeing that the other did not pass on.

"Oh, good heavens, no! not the least in the world," cried boorish Ned, and went on without another word.

"Country lout!" the hero said quietly, with a smile to himself. If he could but have heard the comments upon him which were passing through the mind of Ned!

Clara, for her part, went home with her mind full of angry thoughts. She had no personal feeling about Cyril Rivers. If she liked any one it was poor Charlie, who was her slave. But Clara knew with precocious worldly wisdom that *that* would never come to anything. It might be all very well for the moment. It was pleasant enough to have him hanging about, watching her every look, attentive to her lightest word. But it never could come to anything. The highest prosperity which the future could bring to Charlie would be advancement in the public office where he was now a junior clerk. And that was no lot for her to share: she, Mr. Burton's daughter, might (her father said) pick and choose among the most eligible men in England. Mr. Burton was in the habit of speaking in this unguarded way. Clara was his favourite in the family, his chosen companion, his almost confidante. He was proud of her beauty and "style," and fond of thinking that, in mind at least, she resembled himself. It was he who had settled that Cyril Rivers should be invited to Dura, and should, as a natural consequence, offer all that remained to the Riverses to Clara. The idea of this alliance pleased his mind, though the Riverses were not so rich as they used to be. "They are still very well off, and the title must be taken into consideration," he had said to his wife. And when Clara returned home she found her parents sitting together in the library, which was not very common, and discussing their children's prospects, which was less common still. It was October, and there was a fire over which Mrs. Burton was sitting. She was a chilly woman at all times. She had not blood enough, nor life enough physically, to keep her warm, and she had been up late, and was tired and not disposed to be on her best company behaviour in the big drawing-room on the chance that the Marchioness might come down-stairs. Mrs. Burton was not quite so placid as she once had been. As her children had grown up, there had been complications to encounter more, trying

to the temper than the naughtiness of their childhood; and it sometimes happened that all the advantage to be gained from a succession of fine visitors would be neutralised, or partially neutralised, by the reluctance of the mistress of the house to devote her personal attention to them. Or so, at least, Mr. Burton thought. His wife, on the other hand, was of opinion that it was best to leave the visitors sometimes to themselves; and this was what she had done to-day. She had established herself over the library fire with a book after luncheon, leaving the

Marchioness and the young ladies to drive or to repose as they pleased. And this piece of self-will had procured her a reprimand, as forcible as Mr. Burton dared to deliver, when he came in and found her there.

"You are throwing away our chances, Clara," he said. "You are setting the worse example to the children. If the Marchioness had not been resting in her own rooms——"

"The Marchioness is very well, Mr. Burton," said his wife. "You may be sure I



See page 139.

know what I am doing so far as she is concerned. She does not want me to follow her about and make a fuss, as some people do."

"I have always told you," said Mr. Burton, "that I wished the utmost civility to be shown to people of her rank in my house. Why, Clara, what can you be thinking of? With all the ambitious ideas you have in your head for Ned——"

"My ambition is very easily satisfied," she said, "if you will let the boy follow his own inclinations. He has no turn for busi-

ness; all that he would do in business would be to lose what you have made."

"If he makes a good match—if he marries into the Merewether family—I should not say another word about business," said Mr. Burton. Looking at him in daylight, it was still more easy to perceive the change that had come over him. His clothes, those well-made, light-coloured clothes which had once been a model of everything that clothes should be, had begun to look almost shabby, though they were in themselves as glossy and as spotless as ever. Anxiety was written

in the lines about his eyes. "Should the children do well, Clara—should they do as we wish them—I should be tempted myself to get out of the business, when I have an opportunity," he said. "It is wearing work, especially when one has nobody to help, nobody to sympathise;" and the man who had been always the incarnation of prosperity, needing no props of external support, puffed out from his bosom a real sigh.

Mrs. Burton took no notice; she was perfectly calm and unmoved, either unaware that her husband had displayed anything like emotion, or indifferent to it.

"I cannot say that I have ever been fond of these match-making schemes," she said, "and Ned is only a boy; but there is one thing that must be taken into consideration, whatever you may do in this matter; that is Norah Drummond. If she thinks differently, you may as well give up the conflict."

"Norah Drummond!" said Mr. Burton, grinding his teeth. "By Jove! they talk about a man's pleasant sins being against him; but there is nothing so bad in that way as his unpleasant virtues, I can tell you. If all the annoyance I have had through these two women could be reckoned up—"

"I do not know what annoyance you may have had yourself," said Mrs. Burton, in her cold, judicial way. "I have seen nothing to complain of. But now I confess it begins to be unpleasant. She has more influence over Ned than any of us. He danced with her last night before any one else. He is always there, or meeting her at other places. I have observed it for some time. But you have done nothing to stop it, Mr. Burton. Sometimes I have thought you approved, from the way you have allowed things to go on."

"I approve!" he cried, with something like horror.

"How was I to know? I do not say it is of very much importance. Ned, of course, will follow his own taste, not ours."

"But, by Jove, he shan't!" cried Mr. Burton. "By Jove, he shall take himself out of this, and make his own way, if I hear any more nonsense. What! after all I have done to set them up in the world—after all I have gone through!"

He was affected, whatever was the cause. There was something like agitation about him. He was changed altogether from the confident man of former times. His wife looked at him with a little surprise, and

came to this conclusion quite suddenly. She had not noticed it when he was among other people, playing his part of host with an offensive hospitality which often annoyed her, and which the Marchioness, for example, scarcely hesitated to show her contempt of. But now, when there was no one present, when he was free to look as he pleased, Mrs. Burton found out all at once that her husband was changed. Was it merely that he was older, tired with last night's dissipation, not so able to defy late hours, and supper and champagne, as he had once done? She was not a woman to rest in so superficial a view of affairs; but for the moment these were the questions she asked herself, as she looked at him with calm yet undeniable surprise.

"You seem to be excited, Mr. Burton," she said.

"Excited!" he cried; "and good reason, too; with you sitting there as cold as a little fish, never thinking of the interests of your family, talking of Ned thwarting me as if it was nothing! If I were excited it would be little wonder, I think."

"I have no desire that Ned should thwart you," she said; "on the contrary, it is my own wish. He will never make a good man of business. A marriage with one of the Merewethers, or a girl in that position, with your money, Mr. Burton, would be the best thing for him. He might get into Parliament, and do all that I once hoped for you; but what I hoped is neither here nor there."

Mrs. Burton was only human, though she was so philosophical; and this was a stroke in her own defence.

"See that Ned does it, then," he said. "Perhaps it was what I hoped too; but business has swallowed me up, instead of leaving me more free. You ought to make it your duty to see that Ned does what we both wish. What is there to stand in the way?"

"Not much," said Mrs. Burton, shrugging her shoulders. "Norah Drummond—not a very large person—that is all."

"Confound Norah Drummond! A man is always a fool when he thinks of other people. I am finding that out too late. But you may compose yourself about Ned," added the father, with irony. "That little thing has other fish to fry. She is poking herself into Clara's way, confound her! That sentimental ass, Rivers, who is unfit to touch my child's hand—"

"I heard of that too," said Mrs. Burton, in a low voice.

"I should think you did hear of it; but

you never interfered, so far as I could see. He would have danced with her all night, if I had not taken it into my own hands. The ass! a poor little chit like that, when he might have had Clary! But, however, understand me, Clara, this is a woman's business. I want these children settled and put out in life. Ned may be rather young, but many a young fellow in his position is married at one-and-twenty. And, by Jove, I can't go on bearing this infernal strain! I should give it up if it was not for them."

"Is there anything going wrong, Mr. Burton?" asked his wife.

"What should be going wrong? I am tired of working and never getting any sympathy. I want a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law who will do us credit—but, above all, a son-in-law. And I don't see any obstacle in the way which you cannot overcome, if you choose."

"I wonder," said Mrs. Burton, "can I overcome Norah Drummond?—and her mother? They are the obstacles in the way."

"Thanks to my confounded good-heartedness," said her husband.

And it was at this moment Clara came in and joined their deliberations. Little more, however, was said, and she was sent away to seek out Lady Florizel, and do her duty to the young visitors as the daughter of the house should. Mr. Burton went off himself to see if the Marchioness had made herself visible, and do his best to overwhelm her with fussy hospitality. But Mrs. Burton sat still on the library fire and warmed her cold little feet, and set her mind to work out the problem. It was like a game of chess, with two skilfully-arrayed, scientific lines of attack all brought to nothing by a cunning little knight, of double movement-power, in the centre of the board. Either of the schemes on which her husband had set his heart, or both—and one of them was dear to herself also if she would have acknowledged it—might be brought to a satisfactory issue, if this little Norah, this penniless child, this poor little waif, who had grown up at their gates, could but be put out of the way. Was the part of Nemesis, so unlike her childish appearance and character, reserved for Norah? or was the mother using her child as the instrument of a deep, and patient, and long-prepared vengeance? It was the latter view of the question which was most congenial to Mrs. Burton's mind; but whether it was that or fate, the greatest combinations which the family at the great house had yet ventured on, the things most concerning

their comfort and happiness, were suddenly stopped short by this little figure. It was Norah Drummond, only Norah, who was the lion in the way.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NED BURTON went to the post, as he had said. He had to pass the Gatehouse on his way; and his business was not of so important a description that he should make any haste about it, or tire himself with walking. He loitered along, looking into the windows, sore at heart and wistful. There was no one, to be sure, at Mrs. Drummond's end of the Gatehouse. He tried to get a glimpse at the interior through the chinks of the little green Venetian blinds which veiled the lower panes; but they were turned the wrong way, and he could not see anything. He had made up his mind he should be sure to see Norah, for no particular reason except that he wanted so much to see her. But no Norah was visible. At the other end of the house, however, Stephen Haldane's window was open as usual, and he himself sat within, looking almost eagerly for that interview with the outside world which his open window permitted. The summer was over, with all its delights, and soon the window would have to be closed, and Stephen's chair removed into winter quarters. What a deprivation this was to him no one knew;—but just at the fall of the year, when the transparent lime-leaves had turned into yellow silk instead of green, and littered the flags under the window, Stephen looked out more eagerly than he was wont for some one to talk to him. It was his farewell, in a measure, to life. And Ned was but too glad to stop and lean against the outer sill, keeping always an eye upon the door, and Mrs. Drummond's windows. He was not handsome. He had a large nose—too large for the rest of his face—which his aunt, Mrs. Everest, sometimes comforted him by suggesting was a sign of character and energy, but which Ned had been used to hear all his friends laugh at. The young community at Dura had brought themselves up in all the frankness of family relations, and were wont to laugh freely at Ned's nose, as they laughed at Katie's large teeth, and as, while they were children, they had laughed at Clara's red hair. On that last particular they were undeceived now, and gloried in it, as fashion required; but Katie's teeth and Ned's nose were still amusing to everybody concerned. Poor boy! he had not any feature which was so good as to redeem this imperfection. He had "nice" eyes, a tolerable

mouth, and was well grown and strong; but nobody could say he was handsome. And then, though he was a gentleman in thought and heart, he was a gentleman of twenty, whose real refinement had not yet had time to work out to the surface, and soften away the early asperities. This was why he looked boorish and loutish in the presence of Cyril Rivers, who had not only the easy confidence which springs from good looks, but that inevitable surface suavity which can only be attained by intercourse with the world.

"You are not shooting to-day," said Stephen, from within.

"No; we were all late this morning. I don't know why we should be such muffs," said Ned. "Merewether had to go off to town to get his leave extended; and Rivers is too fine a gentleman, I suppose, to take much trouble. That's not fair, though. I did not mean it. He is a very good shot."

"Who is he?" said Stephen. "I have been hearing a great deal about him this morning."

"Oh, have you?" Ned looked yellow as the lime leaves which came tumbling about his head, and his nose was all that was visible under the hat, which somehow, in his agitation, he pulled over his brows. "He is a man about town, I suppose. He is member for somewhere or other—his father's borough. He is an æsthetic sort of politician, diplomatist, whatever you like to call it: a man who plays at setting all the world right."

"But who does not please Ned Burton, I am afraid," said Stephen, with a smile. "I hear you all enjoyed yourselves very much last night."

"Did we?" said Ned. "The girls did. I suppose they don't think of much else. But as one grows older, one sees the absurdity of things. To think of a man, a rational being, putting his brains in his pocket, and giving himself up to the cultivation of his legs! Oh, yes; we all did our fetish worship, and adored the great god Society, and longed to offer up a few human sacrifices; though there are enough, I suppose, without any exertion of ours," said Ned, leaning both his arms on the window. He heaved such a sigh, that the leaves fluttered and whirled before the mighty breath. And Stephen Haldane suppressed a laugh, though he was not very gay. It was hardly possible to help being amused by this juvenile despair. And yet, poor Stephen going back into those old memories, which looked a thousand years off, could not but recollect, with a smile and a sigh, similar hours and moments, in which he

too had sounded the very depths of tragedy and endured all the tortures of despair.

"My poor boy," he said, with a tone which was half comic, half pathetic, "I feel for you. Did you ever hear of *ces beaux jours quand j'étais si malheureux*?"

Ned looked up in a blaze of sudden resentment.

"I did not think I had said anything funny—though it is always pleasant to have amused you, Mr. Haldane," he said, with desperate politeness. "I am going to the post-office. I rather think I shall have to be postman, and carry out the bags to-day. Good morning. I ought not to have stood so long keeping you from your book."

But Stephen's laugh was very low and tender when the young fellow went on, walking at the rate of six miles an hour. Poor Ned! There was not so much to laugh at, for he had serious difficulties in his way—difficulties of which he tried to remind himself as he turned up the village street, by way of making himself a little more unhappy. But the attempt did not succeed. The fact was that his real troubles counted for nothing in the mixture of misery and anger which filled his youthful bosom. The shadow which filled the air with blackness, and made life intolerable, was—Norah. She had slighted him, wounded him, preferred some one else. In presence of this terrible sorrow, all the doubts about his future career, the serious question about the business, the discussions of which he had been the subject, faded into insignificance. It seemed to Ned even that he would gladly consent to go into the business at half an hour's notice if only that half hour would procure him the chance of making himself more miserable still by an interview with Norah. What a fool he was, poor boy! how wretched he was! and what poor creatures those people are who are never wretched and never fools!

Ned Burton lounged about into half the shops in the village in his unhappiness. He bought an ugly little mongrel from a lying porter at the station, who swore to its purity of blood. Ned, in an ordinary way, knew a great deal more about this subject than the porter did, but it gained him a little time, and Norah might, for anything he knew, become visible in the meantime. He went into Wigginton's and bought a rose-coloured ribbon for his straw hat. It was quite unsuitable; but Norah wore rose-coloured ribbons, and it was a forlorn profession of allegiance, though nobody would ever know it. He went to the confectioner's, and bought

a bag of cakes, with which he fed half a dozen gaping children outside. In short, he visited as many tradespeople as Mother Hubbard did. But it was all in vain. No Norah passed by; no one like her went into any of the shops. When he passed the Gatehouse once more, the windows were all vacant still. Then Ned took a desperate resolution, and went and paid a visit at the Rectory. He sat with Mrs. Dalton in the drawing-room, and then he strolled round the garden with the girls. When things had come to this pass, Providence befriended him, and sent a special messenger, in the shape of Mr. Nicholas, to take up Mary's attention. As soon as he was alone with her sister, Ned seized the opportunity.

"Katie," he said, breathless, "you might do me such a favour."

"Might I?" said friendly Katie; "then of course I will, Ned."

"You are always the nicest and the kindest! Katie, I have something to say to Norah Drummond; something I—have to tell her—by herself. I can't go to the house, for it is something—a kind of a secret."

"I'll run and fetch her. I know what you have got to say to her," said Katie, laughing. "Oh, how funny you are! Why didn't you say it right out, you silly boy?"

"It is not what you mean at all," said Ned, with great gravity.

But Katie laughed, and ran across the road.

And this was how the interview came about. Norah came over to the Rectory in all innocence, fearing nothing. She said, "Oh, Ned is here too!" as if nothing had happened. Indeed, she was not aware that anything had happened—only that a game at croquet would be the best way of spending the listless afternoon after the dissipation of the previous night. They sat down on a bench behind that clump of laurels which hid a portion of the lawn from the windows of the Rectory. Mary and Mr. Nicholas were walking up and down, round and round. The red geraniums were still bright in the borders, with all manner of asters, and salvias, like scarlet velvet. The autumn leaves were dropping singly, now one, now another, without any sound; the air was very still and soft, the sun shining through a pleasant haze. A sheaf of great, splendid, but dusty gladiolus, stood up against the dark green laurel. They were like Clara in her full and brilliant beauty—not like little Norah in her grey frock, sitting quite still and happy, thinking of nothing, on the warm bench in the sunshine, with her hands folded in her lap, waiting for

Katie to come back with the croquet mallets, and altogether unconscious of the dark looks Ned was casting upon her from under his hard brows.

"I suppose Katie will come when she is ready," he said, in reply to some question. "She is not always at your word and beck, like me."

"Are you at my word and beck?" she said, looking round upon him with some surprise. "How funny you look, Ned! Is anything the matter? Are you—going away?"

"I often think I had best go away," said Ned, in Byronic melancholy. "That would be better than staying here and having every desire of my heart trampled on. It seems hard to leave you; and I am such a fool—I always stay on, thinking anything is better than banishment. But after being crushed to the earth, and having all my wishes disregarded, and all my feelings trampled on—"

"Oh, Ned! what can you mean? Who has done it? Is it that dreadful business again?"

"Business!" said Ned, with what he would have described as the hollow laugh of despair. "That seemed bad enough when I had nothing worse to bear. But now I would embrace business; I would clasp it in my arms. Business! No! That affected only my inclinations; but this goes to my heart."

"Ned," said Norah, growing pale, "you must be over-tired. That is it. You shoot all day—and then the ball last night. Poor boy! you are taking fancies in your head. You don't know what you are saying. You have been over-tired."

Upon which Ned shook his head, and laughed again, this time "wildly." He was very miserable, poor fellow, and yet it cannot be said that he was quite indifferent to the effect he produced. It gave him a certain satisfaction in the midst of his despair.

"If you were to ask yourself, Norah, what is the matter, instead of suggesting so far less than the reality—so much less—" he began.

Then Norah took courage.

"Is that all!" she said. "Oh, what a fright you gave me! Is it only something I have done without knowing it? You ridiculous, silly boy! Why can't you tell me plainly what it is, without all this nonsense? You know it is nonsense," Norah continued, warming as she went on. "What can I have done? Besides, however disagreeable I may have been, what right have you to mind? Nobody else minds. I am not a slave, ;

to be allowed to make myself unpleasant. There! I will be disagreeable if I like! I am not to be always bound to do what is pleasant to you."

"If you take me up in this spirit, Norah——"

"Yes, I mean to take you up in this spirit. You have no right to feel everything like a ridiculous sensitive plant. Why should you? If I were a sensitive plant I might have some cause. I am little, I am friendless, I am very poor; I have nothing in the world but mamma. But for you to set up to have feelings, Ned! you, a boy! that can go where you like, and do what you like, and have heaps of money, and everybody bowing down before you! It is because you have nothing really to vex you, that you are obliged to invent things. Oh, you wicked, ungrateful boy, to pretend that you are unhappy! Look at Mr Stephen, and look at mamma!"

"But, Norah," said Ned hurriedly; "Norah, dear! listen to me only one moment."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said. "I won't listen to you. I have plenty of things to bother me, and you have nothing. You never had to think whether you could spend this or that—whether you could have a new coat, or go a journey, or anything; and you go and make troubles because you have not got any." Here she made a pause, turning her head away, so that poor Ned was more miserable than ever. And then all at once she turned and looked up kindly at him. "What was it I did, Ned?"

This sudden revolution overwhelmed him altogether. He felt the water leap to his eyes. He was so young. And then he laughed unsteadily.

"What a girl you are, Norah!" he said.

"Was I cross last night? What did I do? I didn't mean it, I am sure. I came over quite innocently, never thinking Katie was bringing me to be scolded. It was not friendly of Katie. She ought to have told me. But, Ned, what was it? Tell me what I did."

"Norah, things must not go on like this. I cannot do it. It may be as much as my life is worth," said the youth. "Look at those two over there; they may quarrel sometimes——"

"They quarrel every day of their lives," said Norah, breathless, in a parenthesis.

"But they know that they belong to each other," said Ned; "they know that right or wrong nobody will part them. But, Norah, think how different I am. You may not mind, but it kills me. Once you said you loved me—a little."

"I love—everybody; we, all of us, love

each other," said Norah, in a subdued voice.

"But that is not what I want. I love you very differently from that, Norah; you know I do. I want you to belong to me as Mary belongs to Nicholas. Next year I will be of age, and something must be settled for me, Norah. How do you think I can face all this talking and all this advising if I don't know what you are going to do? Give me your hand, Norah; give it me into mine; it is not the first time. Now, am I to keep it always? Tell me yes or no."

"Oh! you hurt me—a little, Ned!"

"I cannot help it," he said; "not so much, not half so much, as you hurt me. Oh, Norah, put yourself in my place! Think, only think, how I can bear to see you talking to other people, smiling at them, looking up as you look at me. Is it possible, Norah? And perhaps I may have to go away to fight with the world, and make my own career. And would you send me away all in the dark without knowing? Oh, Norah, it would be cruel; it would not be like you."

"Please, please, Ned! Mary and Mr. Nicholas are coming. Let go my hand."

"Not until you give me some sort of answer," said Ned. "I have loved you since ever I remember—since I was a boy, frightened to speak to you. You have always laughed and giped; but I never minded. I love you more than all the world, Norah! I can't help thinking it would be so easy for you to love me, if you only would try. You have known me since we were children. You have always had me to order about, to do whatever you liked with."

"Wait till they have passed," said Norah, in a whisper, drawing her hand out of his.

And then the elder pair, who were engaged, and had a right to walk about together, and hold long private conferences, and quarrel and make friends, passed slowly, suspending their talk also out of regard for the others.

"Are you waiting for Katie?" Mary said. "She is so tiresome; always finding something unexpected to do."

"Oh, I am talking to Ned. We are in no hurry," Norah replied.

And then those full-grown lovers, the pair who had developed into actuality, whom Ned envied, and who had been having a very sharp little quarrel, passed on.

Ned was very much in earnest, poor fellow. His face was quite worn and full of lines. There was a strain and tremulous tension about him which showed how high his excitement was.

"It isn't as if this was new to you, Norah," he cried piteously. "You have known it ever so long. And I cannot help thinking you might love me so easily, if you would, Norah, you are so used to me—if you only would!"

Norah was very sympathetic, and his emotion moved her much. She cast down her eyes; she could not bear to look at him, and she nearly cried.

"Oh, Ned," she said, "I do love you. I am very fond of you; but how can I tell if it is in that way? How can you tell? We are just like brother and sister. We have never known anybody else all our lives."

"I have," said Ned, "I have known hundreds. And there is no girl in all the world but one, and that is you. Oh, Norah, that is you!"

"But I have never seen any one," said Norah again. She spoke so very softly that he could scarcely hear. "I have never seen any one," she repeated, heaving a gentle sigh—a sigh which was half regret for Ned and half for herself. "Dear Ned, I do love you. But how could I tell until I saw——?"

"Ah!" he cried, and let her hand drop in his youthful impatience and mortification. "If that is all your answer, Norah, the best thing for me is to rush away. Why should I stay here any longer? There will be nothing to live for, nothing to hope for!"

"Oh, don't talk nonsense, Ned!"

"It is not nonsense," said Ned, rising up. "Norah, if you hear I am gone you will know why it is. If you hear of anything happening to me, I hope you will be sorry. Oh, Norah, Norah!" he cried, the tears forcing themselves to his eyes, "is it all to end like this?"

He was so young. His despair was real, though it might be too-tragical in its outward form. He was capable of going away, as he said, and making himself hugely uncomfortable, and for a time intensely unhappy; and yet perhaps being all the better for it in the end. But Norah, who was not much wiser than himself, was driven to her wit's end by this adjuration, and did not know what to say.

"Ned, don't be so sorry," she said, taking his hand in her turn. "Oh, dear Ned, I do love you; but your people would be very angry, and we are so young. We must not think of such things yet. Oh, I am sure I did not mean to make you unhappy. Don't cry. I could not bear to see you crying, Ned!"

"I am not crying," he said roughly. He

had to be rough, he had been so near it. And just at this moment Katie came smiling up with the mallets over her shoulders. He could not come down from that elevation of feeling into this. "I am afraid I must go now," he said, almost turning his back upon them. "I am going to the—to the station now. Merewether is coming by this train."

"Oh, Ned, how unkind of you, when everything is ready for a game!" cried Katie. But Norah said nothing as he strode away, giving a nod at them over his shoulder. He had not been boorish while he was pleading his own cause; but he had not the heart to be civil when it was over. Cæsars of twenty do not pull their cloaks gracefully about them when they are going to die.

Then Norah suddenly turned upon her companion, and metaphorically gagged and bound her.

"How tiresome it was of you to be so long!" she cried. "Here we have been waiting and waiting, till Ned's time was up; and so is mine. I must go back to mamma."

"Why, I have not been gone ten minutes!" cried indignant Katie.

But Norah, too, waved her hand, and moved majestically away. She could scarcely keep from crying. Her heart was full; something was quivering in her throat. It was not so much her own emotion as the reflection of his. Poor Ned! how hard it was that he should be so miserable! She wanted to get safely to her own room, that she might think it over! She walked across the road as if she had been in a dream. She did not hear Mr. Stephen call to her in her abstraction. She went in enveloped, as it were, in a cloud of sad and curious fancies, wondering—Was it all over? Would he never say any more about it? Would he go away, and never be heard of more? Would it—and the very thought of this thrilled through Norah's veins, and chilled her heart—would it do him harm? Would he die?

CHAPTER XXIX.

MRS. BURTON had taken a very serious piece of work in hand. No wonder that she lingered over the fire in the library, or in her drawing-room, or wherever she could find a fire, in those early chills of October, to warm her little cold toes, and to make up her plan of warfare. She was a chilly little woman, as I have said. She had not much except a mind to keep her warm, and mind is not a thing which preserves the caloric thoroughly unless it is comforted by the close vicinity of

other organs. Mrs. Burton had no body to speak of; and, so far as has been seen, not very much heart. Her mind had to fulfil all the functions usually performed by these other properties, and to keep her warm besides; so that it was not wonderful if she sat over the fire.

It was not to be expected, however, that the Marchioness would always be so obliging as to remain in her room till three o'clock; and consequently Mrs. Burton's thinking had to be done at odd moments when the cares of her household could be lawfully laid aside. She was rather in bondage to her distinguished guest; and as she was a little republican, a natural democrat at heart, the bondage was hard to her. She was a great deal cleverer than the Marchioness of Upshire; her mind went at railroad speed, while that great lady jogged along at the gentlest pace. Where the heart is predominant, or even a good, honest, placid body, there is tolerance for stupidity; but poor intellect is always intolerant. Mrs. Burton chafed at her noble companion, and suffered tortures inwardly; but she was very civil, so far as outward appearance went, and did her duty as hostess in a way which left nothing to be desired.

But it took all her powers to master the problem before her. She had an adversary to overcome; an adversary whom she did not despise, but whom everybody at the first glance would have thought too slight a creature to merit so much as a thought. Mrs. Burton knew better. She looked at Norah Drummond not in her simple and evident shape as a little girl of eighteen, the daughter of a poor mother, who lived upon a hundred pounds a year. This was what Norah was; and yet she was a great deal more. She was the commander of a little compact army, of which the two chief warriors, love and nature, were not much known to Mrs. Burton; but which was reinforced by youth, and supreme perverseness and self-will, powers with which she was perfectly acquainted. Ned's love his mother might perhaps have laughed at; but Ned's obstinacy, his determination to have his own way, were opponents at which she could not laugh; and they were arrayed against her. So was the capricious fancy, the perverse individuality of Cyril Rivers, who was a man accustomed to be courted, and not over-likely to fall into an arrangement made for him by his family. Mrs. Burton pondered much upon all these things. She found out that her guest was seen at the Gatehouse almost every day, and she saw from her son's aspect that he too knew

it, and was beginning to hate his rival. Then there arose a little conflict in her mind as to which of her two children she should make herself the champion of. A mother, it may be thought, would incline most to the daughter's side; but Mrs. Burton was not an emotional mother. She was not scheming how she could save her children pain. The idea of suffering on their part did not much affect her—at least, suffering of a sentimental kind. She formed her plan at last with a cold-blooded regard to their advantage, founded on the most careful consideration. There was no particular feeling in it one way or another. She had no desire to injure Norah, or even Norah's mother, more than was inevitable. She had not even any harsh or revengeful feelings towards them. To confound their projects was necessary to the success of her own—that was all; but towards themselves she meant no harm. With an equal impartiality she decided that her operations should be on Ned's side. If she could be said to have a favourite, it was Ned. Clara was self-seeking and self-willed to a degree which was disagreeable to Mrs. Burton. Such strenuous sentiments were vulgar and coarse to the more intellectually constituted nature. And Clara had so much flesh and blood, while her mother had so little, that this, too, weakened the sympathy between them. The mother, who was all mind, could not help having a certain involuntary unexpressed contempt for the daughter whose overwhelming physique carried her perpetually into a different world. But what was vulgar in Clara was allowable in Ned; and then Ned had talent in his way, and had taken his degree already, and somewhat distinguished himself, though he was careful, as he himself said, to "put his brains in his pocket," and refrain from all exhibition of them when he got home. Then, it would not have flattered Mrs. Burton's vanity at all to see her daughter the Hon. Mrs., or even Lady Rivers; but it was a real object with her to see her son in Parliament. She had tried hard to thrust her husband into a seat, with a little swell of impatience and ardour in her heart, to have thus an opportunity of exercising her own powers in the direction of the State. It was a thing she could have done, and she would have given half her life to have it in her power. But this had turned out an impossible enterprise, and now all her wishes were set upon Ned. With the Merewethers' influence, in addition to their own, Ned, almost as soon as he had come of age, might be a legislator. With the talents he had derived from her, and

which she would stimulate and inspire, he might be of service to his country. It was not an ungenerous aspiration; it was rather, on the contrary, as noble a wish as mere intellect could form. And to attain this it was necessary that Ned should gain his father's favour by bringing a splendid connection to the house of Dura; and that, on the other hand, he should obtain that influence which was his shortest way to the coveted position. What did it matter if a temporary heart-break were the price he had to pay, or even a temporary humiliation in the shape of giving up his own will? His mother decided for him that such a price was a very small matter to pay. She made up her mind accordingly that he should pay it at once, and in its most unquestionable form. That Clara should be humbled, too, and exposed to tortures of wounded pride and mortification, was a pity; but there was no other way.

This, then, was Mrs. Burton's plan: to encourage young Rivers, the suitor whom her husband had chosen for her daughter, to devote himself to Norah; to throw him continually in the girl's way; to make him display his admiration, and if possible his devotion to her; to delude Norah into satisfaction, even response, to the assiduities of her new suitor; and by these means to disgust and detach Ned from the object of his youthful affection. It was a bold scheme, and at the same time it promised to be an easy one. As to what might follow in respect to Clara, the risk would have to be run; but it did not seem a very great risk. In the first place, Clara's "feelings" (a word at which her mother smiled) were not engaged; and in the second place, Cyril Rivers, though he might be foolish enough, was not such a fool as to throw his handsome self away upon a penniless girl without connections or anything to recommend her. There was very little fear that it would ever come to that. He might fall in love with Norah, might flatter and woo, and even break (Mrs. Burton smiled again, the risk seemed so infinitesimal) the girl's heart; but he was not likely, as a man of the world, to commit himself. And if after her end was served it might be thought expedient still that he should marry Clara, why a flirtation of this kind could make very little difference; it might put a stop to Mrs. Burton's ideas at the moment, but it need not effect them in the future. She made this plan, with her toes warming at the library fire, and she did not confide it to any one. Such schemes sound a great deal worse when they are put into words than they feel in the

recesses of the bosom that gave them birth. She felt very well satisfied when she had thus settled what to do. It seemed the minimum of pain for the maximum of advantage; and then it was a kind of pain which Mrs. Burton could not but contemplate with a certain mockery, and which she could but faintly realise.

At luncheon that day it turned out, as she supposed, that Mr. Rivers was not one of the shooting party. He had been writing letters, he said; he was going to call at the Rectory in the afternoon to see Mr. Dalton. In short, he had an appointment. Mr. Dalton was a member of the Anthropological Society to which he also belonged.

"I wonder if I might ask you to do something for me," said Mrs. Burton. "It is just to leave a note at the Gatehouse. You know the Gatehouse? Mrs. Drummond's, just opposite the Rectory."

"Certainly. I know Mrs. Drummond," said Rivers. He answered very promptly, feeling that there was a covert attack intended, and that this was meant to remind him of the allegiance he owed elsewhere. His reply had thus quite an unnecessary degree of promptitude and explanatoriness. "I have known her for many years. In fact, I called there yesterday." He felt it was expedient for his own independence to assert his freedom of action at once.

"Then you won't mind leaving my note," said Mrs. Burton. "We are getting up a picnic for Wednesday, you know; and I should like Norah to be with us. She has rather a dull life at home, poor child."

"That is the pretty girl you were dancing with, Mr. Rivers," said Lady Florizel, "with dark hair and hundreds of little flounces. I should have said she was too little for so many flounces, if she had consulted me."

"That is the mistake girls always make," said the Marchioness, "especially girls who are not in society. They follow the fashion without ever thinking whether it suits them or not."

"But, under correction, I think it did suit her," said Mr. Rivers. "Do not let us call them flounces—call them clouds, or lines of soft white mist. I am not sufficiently learned in *chiffons* to speak."

"Oh, but you are delightful on *chiffons*!" said Lady Florizel. "Men always are when they know just a little. Sometimes, you know, one can actually derive an idea from you; and then you make the most delicious mistakes. Clara, let us make him talk *chiffons*; it is the greatest fun in the world."

"I have more confidence in my maid," said Clara. She was not in the habit of controlling herself or hiding her emotions. She contracted her white forehead, which was not very high by nature, with a force which brought the frizzy golden fringe of hair over her very eyebrows—and pouted with her red lips. "Besides, Mr. Rivers has something better to do," she said, getting up from the table.

She was the first to get up—a thing which filled the Marchioness with consternation. Clara was a girl of the nineteenth century, feeling that her youth, and her bloom, and riotous, luxurious beauty made her queen of the more gently toned, gently mannered company. She broke up the party with that pout and frown.

Rivers went away with the note in his pocket, believing devoutly that it had been intended for a snare for him, a way of interfering with his freedom. "Let her wait at least till I am in her toils, which will not be just yet," he said to himself while he went down the avenue; while Clara pursued her mother, who had gone to put on her bonnet to accompany the Marchioness on her drive, up stairs.

"How could you, mamma?" she cried. "Oh, how could you? It is because you think nothing of me; you don't care for me. To ask the Drummonds at all was bad enough; but to send Cyril Rivers to ask them. It seems too bad even for you."

"Clara, what is Cyril Rivers to you?"

"To me?" Clara faltered, stopped short, was silent, gazing at her mother with blue, wide-open eyes, which astonishment made round. Even to a dauntless girl, accustomed to speak her mind, the question was a hard one. She could not answer, "Papa means him to marry me. He is my property; no one has any right to him but me," as she might have done had she spoken at all. It requires a very great deal of hardihood to put such sentiments into speech, and Clara, with all her confidence, was not quite bold enough. She gazed at her mother with angry blue eyes, speaking with them what she could not say in words; but all she could do audibly was to murmur again, "To me!"

"Yes, to you. I don't know what right you have to interfere. If you consider that you have any just right, state it to me; and if I find it reasonable I will tell you what I am doing; but, otherwise, not a word. In the circumstances composure and patience are the best things for you. I am acting,

and I shall act, towards Mr. Rivers according to principles of my own, and a system of my own; and I don't mean to be interfered with, Clara. You understand that."

"I shall speak to papa," said Clara, in her anger. "I shall just tell it all to papa."

"Do, my dear," said her mother calmly, and put on her bonnet. It was clear that now, at least, there was not another word to be said.

Clara went away in her anger to Lady Florizel for sympathy.

"Mamma has made up her mind to ask those people," she said. "And I hate them. They are low people—people that ought not to be asked to meet you."

"Oh, as for us, never mind! They will not hurt us," said Lady Florizel, shrugging her shoulders; "but I thought you told me you were great friends with the people in the village before the ball."

"That is the worst of all," said Clara. "We are great friends. They were all the company I ever had before I came out. But now, when I don't require them any longer, they have grown disagreeable; and yet there is the old habit existing all the same."

"Poor Clara!" said her new companion, "what a bore for you! Village companions are so apt to be a bore. But I am sure if you were to talk to your mamma she would find some way of getting rid of them. That would be the best."

"Why, it is she that is asking them," said Clara.

And it became more and more apparent that her injury was past help; for in the face of her mother's invitation what could even papa do?

Mr. Rivers carried the note with much fidelity to its destination. "I should not have ventured to come," he said, when he went in and met Mrs. Drummond's look of suspicion, "but for *this*. And I hope it will find favour in your eyes. I suppose I am to wait and take an answer? And it will be a favourable answer, I hope."

Helen and her child had been talking of him before he appeared, and Norah had been a little agitated, half-pleasurably, half-painfully, by her mother's warning.

"I do not like him to come so often," Mrs. Drummond had said. "Whether he means anything or not, I would much rather he did not come."

"Mean, mamma! What could he mean, except to talk to you a little? I am sure he does not mean anything," Norah had cried, with the premature confidence of her age.

And then he had made his appearance, and with the knowledge of that brief discussion in her mind she was embarrassed, and felt as if he must read all about it in her eyes.

"May I tell you what it is, Miss Drummond?" he asked, turning to her, while her mother opened the note, and sinking his voice. "It is a picnic to the old tower of Dura. I suppose you know all about it. It is to be on Wednesday, and I hope you will come."

"Oh, a picnic!" said Norah, with a flush of joyful anticipation. "I never was at a real grown-up picnic. I should like it so much, if mamma thinks we may."

"But perhaps you could influence mamma."

"No, no. I don't think it. I would rather not bother her," said Norah, with a little hesitation, feeling all her embarrassment return. "Of course she must know best."

"Oh, of course," said Mr. Rivers. He smiled as he looked at her, and Norah, giving a wistful, furtive glance at him, was suddenly seized with spontaneous wonder as to what he meant—a question not arising from what her mother had said, but from herself. The thought sprung up in her mind unawares, bringing with it a blush. What could he mean? Why did he come so often? Why did he wish that she should have this new pleasure? What could it matter to him? There would be plenty of people at the picnic—young people, nice people, pretty people, people all dressed in purple and fine linen—who would be much more like him than Norah. And why should he care? A delicious doubt, a delicious suspicion came into her thoughts. Could it be possible? Might it really, really—? She shut some little trapdoor down upon it resolutely in her mind, and would not look at, would not consider that suggestion; but it ran through all her veins when she cast it out of her thoughts. Could it be possible? And this was not Ned Burton, a boy whom she had known all her life, but the hero of romance himself—he who looked as if he had walked out of a book. It flattered her—she could not tell why. She cast down her eyes, for he had been looking at her all the time, and it seemed to her as if he must be able to tell her thoughts.

But he did not. He took up the cotton with which she was working, and wound and unwound it upon his fingers.

"I have to run over to the Rectory," he

said. "Perhaps I had better do that now, and come back to get my answer. Perhaps then I might have a cup of tea? This room is the very sort of room to drink tea in. The first dish of tea must have been made here."

"It is not so old as that."

"Oh, it is as old as we like to believe it," said Mr. Rivers. "Don't disturb Mrs. Drummond. I will go away now, and in half an hour I shall come back." And he let himself out like a child of the house, assuming a familiarity to which he had not any right.

Norah sat quite tremulous, yet perfectly quiet, after he was gone, wondering, and trying to stop herself from wondering—feeling somehow that this must be that power of which she had read, which made the strongest and best of men subject to a girl—and feeling that it was not possible, seeing the girl was "only *me*."

"It is another invitation," Mrs. Drummond said, with a little sigh. "You must decide about it, Norah. It will be a pleasure to you, and it seems hard you should not have a little pleasure. But, on the other hand, my dear, after all you told me about Ned, and how Mr. Rivers—"

"There is nothing about Mr. Rivers, mamma."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not, dear. I do not say there is—anything, Norah; but still it is not comfortable that he should come so often. There is the note. I will not say yes or no, my darling. You shall decide whether we shall go or stay."

Norah read the note over with glowing eyes. The blood came hot to her face. It seemed to open up before her a day out of Paradise. The children had made picnics among themselves often enough to Dura Tower. They had gone in the height of the summer for a long day; the boys walking, the girls packed into Mrs. Dalton's pony-carriage, or the little donkey-chair, which lived in the village. Bread and butter, and fruit, and hard-boiled eggs, and bottles of milk was what they used to take with them; and they would come home laden with garlands of the lush woodbine, with honeysuckles in sheaves, and basketfuls of those fragile wild-flowers which never survive the plucking, but which children cannot resist. These old days rose before her with all their sweetness. But this was different;—one of the Dura carriages to take them up; a few hours among the woods, and luncheon out of doors, if it was warm enough; "to show the Marchioness and the young ladies what little antiquities



"IT IS NOT THE LINES," MORGAN SAID, LOOKING AT HERSELF IN DISMAY IN THE OLD-FASHIONED LONG GLASS. "—(See page 147.)

we have." Perhaps the grandeur and the glory of the society would make up for the absence of the brilliant summer, and the freedom of the childish party; but yet—She looked up shyly at her mother with cheeks that were crimson upon her dark eyelashes.

"I suppose, mamma, it would be selfish of me to want to go?"

"That means you do want to go, Norah," said Helen, shaking her head softly, with a half reproachful smile.

"Is it wrong?" said Norah, stealing behind her mother's chair with a coaxing arm round her neck. "I never saw anything like it. I *should* like, just this once. Our old little parties were such baby affairs, mamma. That donkey-chair, what fun it was! And oh! do you remember how it always ran away, and that time when little Jenny fell asleep? But this will be grand—something to see. And you will like the drive; it is such a pretty drive; and the woods will be lovely. I never was there in October before."

"You coaxing child, as Miss Jane says; you want to go."

"Yes, please, mamma."

And Norah dropt a little curtsy demurely, like the child she was no longer. And yet as she stood there in her grey frock, she was so very like a child that Helen had to rub her eyes and ask herself what was this wonderful difference. Yesterday or so Norah had trudged along among the boys, taking her share, pushing them about, carrying her own basket in all the *bon camaraderie* of childhood. Now she was the princess, drawing their wistful looks after her, breaking poor Ned's heart, attracting the other hero out of his natural sphere. How was it? The mother sighed a little, wondering, and smiled, with a sense that the world, which had so long neglected her, was offering to her, to herself, not to Norah, the sweetest, strangest flatteries. She was anxious as to how it might all end, and sometimes was unhappy; and yet she was pleased—what mother ever was otherwise?—"to see her bairn respected like the lave."

And then Mr. Rivers came back for his cup of tea.—What did he want, haunting the old house? He came back for the answer, he said; and called himself Mrs. Burton's man, and the penny-post, and made very merry over the whole transaction. But in all this he made it very apparent that any excuse for coming was sweet to him. And Norah laughed at the joke, and cast down

her pretty eyes, and her colour went and came like the wind. What did he mean? Did he mean anything? Or was it for mere amusement that on every pretext possible he came to the Gatehouse?

CHAPTER XXX.

THERE was, however, another point to be considered before Wednesday, and that was the question of dress, which convulses a poor household when unusual festivities are in progress. Mrs. Drummond's black silk was, as Mrs. Dalton said, "always nice." It had lasted from Helen's prosperous days till now; it had changed its form half-a-dozen times, and now, thanks to the beneficent fashion which prevailed of short walking-dresses, had "come out quite fresh," as Norah declared in triumph. But Norah did not possess that *toilette fraîche* which is indispensable for a young lady at a picnic. Her grey frock was very pretty at home; but amid all the shining garments of the great young ladies, their perfect ribbons, and hats, and boots, and gloves, all those wonderful accessories which poor people cannot hope for, how could she look anything but a poor little Cinderella? "My dress would do, mamma—it is not the dress," Norah said, looking at herself in dismay in the old-fashioned long glass in its ebony frame, as they discussed this matter, "and all that I have is well enough; good enough, you know, very nice for common wear. Short dresses are a blessing, but then they show one's boots; and the cuffs, and the collars, and the ribbons! Perhaps we ought not to have said we would go."

"That is what I feared," said Helen. "It is hard you should not have a little amusement when it comes in your way; and then there are other things to think of; but to live among people who are richer, much richer than one is one's self—"

"What are the other things that have to be thought of?" said Norah, with that sudden fantastic jealousy of ulterior motives which affects the young.

"My dear Norah, I am not mercenary. I would not sacrifice your happiness for any worldly motive. I would not even suggest—But, my darling, you must see people—you must have it in your power at least to meet those whom—you must go into the world."

Norah gazed at her mother with dilated eyes. They had come down into the drawing-room after their inspection of the poor boots and gloves that suggested Cinderella. And the child was standing against the light, against the old brown-grey curtains, which

threatened to crumble into dust any day, and yet held out miraculously. The round mirror made a little picture of her standing there alone, like an old miniature in dim enamel. But Norah was not dim in herself at that moment—her brown eyes were dilated and shining—her cheeks mantled with the overwhelming blush of mingled indignation and shame. "To meet—people!—oh! mamma, mamma, how can you!—is it all true, then, what people say?"

"Yes," said Helen, gravely, "or at least it is half true. I am ashamed, and yet I should not be ashamed. I want you to meet those who can appreciate you, who may love you, Norah, and make your life happy. Why should you look at me so indignantly? it is my duty. But I do not wish to speak of it to you."

"Then I am going—to be inspected—to be offered in the market—to be—oh! mamma, I would rather die!"

"You are going for nothing of the kind. I shall have to put away my companion and friend who was such a comfort to me; and send you back into the place of a silly, impatient child."

"So I am," said Norah, throwing herself at her mother's feet, and hiding her tears and burning cheeks in Helen's gown. "So I am; oh, mamma, can't I work or do something? is there nothing, nothing in the world for a girl, but *that*?"

"Hush, my darling, hush!" said Helen, and it was upon this group that some one came in suddenly, whose indignation was prompt at the sight and unhesitating. It was Dr. Maurice, who had come down from London, as he did periodically, to see the child, whom he considered as his ward; and who instinctively, seeing tears, made up his mind that Norah had been suffering cruelty, and that the mother was in fault.

"What is the matter?" he said. "Norah crying! I have not seen her cry before since she was a baby—there must be a good cause."

"She is growing a woman," said her mother, "and learning something about life, poor child; but fortunately this time the cause is not very grave."

Norah sprang to her feet and dried her tears. She had divined long ere now that her old friend loved her a great deal better than he loved her mother. And Norah was ready to take up arms for her mother, *à outrance*, night or day.

"No, it was not very much," she said, all glowing with tears and blushes and excite-

ment; "it was something you will laugh at—you will think it so like a silly woman. You know you hate us all, Dr. Maurice, and that is what you will say."

"Yes, I hate you all," said the doctor, looking at her with eyes that softened and brightened unconsciously, and a voice that sounded caressing in spite of himself.

"I know it," said Norah. "Well then, Dr. Maurice, this is what I was crying about. We are going to a picnic with the Burtons, and the Marchioness of Upshire, and all kinds of fine people. And I was crying because I have not got a pretty dress."

Dr. Maurice gave a short laugh, and then he turned away his head, and his eyes glistened under their heavy brows. "Poor child!" he said, with a tremble in his voice—if it had been any one else probably he would have sneered, as Norah said, at the frivolity of woman's nature; but, because it was Norah, his heart melted within him, and the water came to his eyes.

"When is it going to come off?" he said.

"Oh, to-day—at one o'clock they were to call for us. Dear doctor," said Norah, looking up at him laughing, yet with the tears still on her eyelashes, "won't you say that, after all, I look very nice in my grey frock?"

"Go away, child," he said, almost angrily; "go and dress yourself and let me look at you after. I want to speak to your mamma."

When she heard this Helen was afraid. She believed in Dr. Maurice because he had been substantially kind, and because he was her husband's friend; but she did not like him, and she had that fear of him which came from the conviction that he disliked and distrusted her.

"Why is this?" he said, as Norah went away. "Mrs. Drummond, I thought you knew that I look upon Norah as if she was my own. She should not want anything if you would let me know—I think you ought for Norah's sake to get over any feeling—and put pride aside."

"It is not so easy," said Helen, with a smile. "Pride, if you call it so, sticks very close. You are very, very kind——"

"I am not kind—I don't mean to be; but I look upon Norah as if she were my own."

"She is not your own, Dr. Maurice," said Helen with spirit. "I cannot put a feeling in the place of a right. Nothing in the world would make me appeal to a stranger for finery for my child. We can live with what we have of our own."

"Pride, pride!" said the doctor hastily. "I don't mean to give offence; but I am not

a stranger—I have known the child from her cradle. Why shouldn't you be so yielding—so kind if you will—as to tell me when she wants a dress? My little Norah! she has been a delight to me all my life. If I had my will, she should rustle with the best."

Helen was angry, but she was moved. A man who loved her child could scarcely shut her heart even by disliking herself. She put out her hand to the surly critic who had never trusted her—"Thanks," she said, "many thanks. I accept your love for Norah; but I could not accept anything else. Why, you must know that! My child, Robert's child, appealing to your charity! Dr. Maurice, I am not ungrateful, but surely Cinderella's frock is better than that."

The doctor was silent, he could not reply. "Poor little Cinderella!" he said; but just then there appeared a vision at the door, which took away his breath. Men are poor creatures where a woman's dress is concerned. To Dr. Maurice, who knew no better, Norah's pretty rose-coloured ribbons, the little end of rose-coloured feather, which relieved the black in her hat, and the fresh little pair of grey gloves, which she had indulged in, made Cinderella at once, without more ado, into the fairy princess. "Why, good heavens, child, what would you have more?" he said, almost with offence. He had been taken in, he thought, and betrayed into an unnecessary warmth of sympathy. It is true that, after a little, even Dr. Maurice saw points which might be improved: but he could not look upon Norah's toilette with the instructed eyes which Clara Burton and Lady Florizel turned upon it; and it was the other girls, the Marchioness, the ladies who knew, not a mere man, ignorant as a baby, whom Norah feared.

However, it was grand to see the carriage glide up to the door, and the ladies get into it. Mrs. Ashurst and her niece were in it already, two highly respectable persons with claims to belong to the county. The Rectory people were not asked, and Katie stood at the window and watched with somewhat wistful looks, waving her hand as they drove away. And Dr. Maurice put them into the carriage, and stood on the steps with his hat off watching them too. There was a splendour about it certainly, whether it was delightful or not. Norah thought of the donkey-chaise laden with children, and for a moment sighed; she had worn brown holland in those days—but now brown holland all embroidered and decorated was a great deal too expensive—far more costly than her grey—and she had

not cared what she wore then, which was far better; whilst now she felt that Miss Ashurst was looking at her, and saw that her cuffs were rather coarse in texture and her feather nothing but a tip. Neither was the drive very lively in the society of these respectable ladies, the younger of whom was older than Norah's mother. But when the carriage approached the end of the pilgrimage, Norah's sky began to brighten. All the others had already arrived, and on a green knoll in front of the old tower the luncheon was being arranged. It was a prettier, gayer sight than the old parties with the donkey chaise. Lady Florizel and her sister were standing at one of the windows in the tower with Ned Burton, looking down; but among the trees near the gate Cyril Rivers was waiting on the outskirts of a group, looking round with evident anxiety, waiting to open the carriage door and hand the ladies out. "I am so glad you have come," he whispered into Norah's ear. His very face brightened up at the sight of them. There is no girl living who could withstand such delicate flattery, and that not from any nobody, not from an old friend and faithful slave like Ned Burton, but from the hero, the prince of romance. Norah's heart grew light in spite of herself; she might be indifferently dressed, she might even look as she felt, a poor relation; but this distinction all the same was hers—the prince had found Cinderella out, and none of the others could get a word from him. He took them to Mrs. Burton, who was doing the honours of the old tower to the Marchioness, and who received them very graciously, giving thanks to some heathenish deity of her own for the success of her plans; and then he found a shady spot for them where they could command everything. "I suppose you do not care to go over the tower," he said. "I know it as well as my A.B.C.," said Norah; and then he placed them under the great ash-tree and took up his own position by Mrs. Drummond's side.

Mrs. Burton gave thanks to her gods for her success. She looked up and saw Ned's eyes peering out of the window above as if he were about to swoop down upon her. "What are you doing, Ned?" she said in momentary alarm.

"Getting this for Lady Florizel," he said, holding out a tuft of wild-flowers from the old wall. And Mrs. Burton thanked that fetish, whoever he was. But she did not see that between the line of Ned's hat and his nose were a pair of eyes glancing fiercely down upon the ash-tree. If lightning could have

come out of mortal eyes, that tree would have shrivelled up and borne no more foliage. The spell was beginning to work. Perhaps Cyril Rivers would not have so committed himself had he not believed that the Burtons had made some scheme to detach him from Norah's side, and to slight and scorn her. He thought they had attempted to make him privy to a plot against her comfort and honour, and that she had been asked here on purpose to be insulted by that impertinence of society which women cannot struggle against. This was the conclusion he came to, and all that was chivalrous and kind was stirred within him. If everybody else neglected them, he at least would show that a man's proper place was by the side of the weak. And then the weak who had to be succoured was so pretty, so charming, so sweet! A man's generous impulses are immensely strengthened in such cases. Miss Ashurst, who was as well born as anybody there, and as well dressed, was really neglected by the whole company: but Mr. Rivers did not feel himself impelled to her side by his desire to succour those who were in need.

"Look there, papa," said Clara Burton, going to her father and thrusting her hand through his arm, "only look there!"

"Rivers!" said Mr Burton, gazing through the branches, "with that girl again!"

"And whose fault is it? Mamma's! It is all mamma. I told you; she actually sent him there—sent him to their house!"

"I will soon put a stop to all that; don't be disturbed, Clara," said her father, and he went off with great vehemence to where his wife was standing. He put his hand on her arm and drew her away from the Marchioness. "One moment—a thousand pardons," he said, bowing to the great lady, and then turned to his wife with the air of a suppressed volcano, "Clara, what on earth do you mean? there's Rivers with those Drummonds again!"

"He has been with them ever since they came, Mr. Burton; probably he will drive home with them. He seems to have made himself their attendant for the day."

"But, good Lord, Clara! what do you mean? Do you mean to drive your daughter out of her senses—don't you intend to interfere?"

"I am acting for the best," said Mrs. Burton, "and it will be at your peril if you meddle. Take it in hand if you please; but if the work is to be mine I must do it my own way."

"But, Clara, for Heaven's sake——"

"I have no time for any more, Mr. Burton. I must be allowed to work, if I work at all, in my own way."

And with this poor satisfaction Mr. Burton had to be content. He went away fuming and secretly smarting with indignation, through the groups of people who were his own guests, gathered together to make him merry. A mixture of rage and bewilderment filled his bosom. He could no more bear to have his Clara crossed than Mrs. Drummond could bear to cross Norah; and his wife's silence was far beyond his comprehension. Clara met him as he came up, with a fluctuating colour, now pale, now crimson, and her white low forehead almost lost under the fringe of hair. She clasped his arm energetically with both hands. "Tell me, papa! what has she got to say?"

"Well, Clara, we must not interfere. Your mother has her own way of acting; she says it is all right. There are dozens more that would be glad of a look from you, Clara. For to-day we are not to interfere."

Clara, who was not in the habit of disguising her feelings, tossed his arm from her, pulling away her hands; she was half wild with injured pride and self-will. She went up to the group under the tree with anger in her step and in her eye.

"Oh Norah!" she said, "I did not know you were coming. Good morning, Mrs. Drummond. Mr. Rivers, I thought you were altogether lost. You disappeared the moment we set you down. I suppose you had something more agreeable in hand."

"I had nothing in hand, Miss Burton, except like everybody else—to amuse myself, I suppose."

"And you have found a charming way of doing that, I am sure," said poor, jealous, foolish Clara; her face was flushed, her voice slightly elevated. She could not bear it; if it had been one of the Ladies Merewether, or even one of the Daltons from the Rectory—but Norah! It was more than she could put up with. Mrs. Drummond, who was decorous, the very soul of good order and propriety, rose up instinctively to cover this little outbreak. "Let us walk about a little," she said. Let us hide this unwomanly self-betrayal, was what she meant.

Norah, too, was wounded and ashamed, though without feeling herself involved. Clara was "in a temper," Norah thought. They all knew that Clara in a temper was to be avoided. She was sorry Mr. Rivers should see it. "Oh Clara! isn't it strange to be here with everything so different," she

said. "Don't you remember our pranks on the grass when we were children? and your pony which we all envied so much? How odd it is in some ways to be grown up!"

Clara took no notice of this conciliatory speech, but Mr. Rivers did. "I hope it is not less pleasant," he said.

"I don't know—we walk about now, instead of running races and playing games. Do you remember, Clara——"

"I have not time to talk over all that old nonsense," said Clara. "The Marchioness is calling me;" and she turned sharply off and joined her mother, who was with that great lady. She was quite pale with anger and dismay. She walked up to Mrs. Burton and looked her in the face. It was *her* doing! and then she drew back a step, and stood behind, doing all she could to make her vexation visible. She wanted to punish her mother. The others had all dispersed into groups; but Clara stood alone, determined to be unhappy. Mrs. Burton, however, was not punished at all; her scheme had succeeded. Her daughter's temper could not last above an hour or two; and her son was safe. He was walking about with Lady Florizel, "paying her," as Miss Ashurst said, "every attention," under her satisfied eyes.

The picnic ran its course like other picnics. It was very delightful to some, and very wretched—a day to date from, as the unhappiest ever known—to others. Cyril Rivers did not, as Mrs. Burton had predicted, leave the Drummonds all day. Had he suspected that this was the very result she aimed at, and that Ned's lowering brows and unhappy looks were the very things the party had been given for, the chances are that he would have resisted the temptation which was stealing over him; but he did not know this, and he did not resist. He thought they were laying vulgar visible claim to him, before he had made up his mind one way or another, and this was a thing his pride refused to allow; while at the same time Norah was very sweet. She was a "rosebud set about with wilful thorns;" she would not agree with him, nor yield in argument; she was not a shadowless beauty all in broad blaze of sunshine and complacency, like Clara; there were clouds and shadows about her, and a veil of soft mystery, spontaneous movements of fancy, wayward digression out of one thing into another. Mrs. Drummond, who was the spectator at the banquet, grew alarmed. She tried to separate them, to lead Norah away among the other people.

But she was balked in that by every means. The other people were chiefly county people, too grand for the Drummonds, who were civil to the handsome mother and pretty daughter, but not anxious for their further acquaintance. Wherever they turned Mr. Rivers met them. He was not cold, nor slow to see when Helen wanted to seat herself, when she wanted to move about. At last, when the afternoon was beginning to wane, and the elder ladies to think of their shawls, some of the younger ones proposed a dance on the green. Mrs. Drummond was left sitting by herself while Norah went to dance with Mr. Rivers, and it was then for the first time that Mr. Burton came up to her. She could not but suppose that he had been taking too much wine.

"Well, Helen," he said, in his loud voice, "this is an unusual sort of scene for you—like it? I don't suppose you know many people, though; but that little girl of yours is going too fast; mind my word, she is going too fast."

"I think, Mr. Burton, you mistake——"

"No, I don't mistake;—going too fast—trying to lead Cyril Rivers off his feet, as she did my Ned. What am I talking of? No, not Ned; Ned has more sense—some other of the lads. But Cyril Rivers, mind you, ain't such a fool as he looks."

He went on, but Helen did not hear him. Suddenly the whole situation glanced upon her. If a flash of lightning had illuminated everything it could not have been more clear. It was not a good light or a friendly that blazed over that scene, which was confused by so many shades of good and evil feeling. Helen's whole spirit had been moved in her by the tone and words of her cousin in respect to her child. He had touched her daughter—and a woman is as a tigress when a finger is laid upon her cub, people say.

I don't know if this was any excuse for her; but certainly, all in a moment, something appeared within her reach which made her heart beat. Revenge! Whatever his degree of guilt had been, this man had been her husband's evil angel; he had put him in the way which had led him to his destruction—with how much or how little guilt who could say? And Helen looked over the bright scene—the dancers on the grass, the groups standing round, the autumn trees dressed out in all their beauty, like their human brethren—and suddenly saw, or thought she saw, that she had the happiness of her adversary's home in her hand. Little Norah, all unaware of her tragic task, was the

Nemesis who was to accomplish their overthrow. There was Ned, heart-broken, but defiant—Ned whom she had seen watching all day, miserable as youth only is; and Clara, furious, making a show of herself in her passion. Was it the sin of the father that was being visited on the children? Helen's heart gave one loud, angry throb; the time of her temptation had come. She did not use the word revenge; all that was brought before her in the sudden tumult of her thoughts was punishment—retribution for sin.

While this terrible suggestion flashed into Helen's mind and took sudden possession of it, another idea had begun to germinate in another bosom, which was to bear fruit also. Dr. Maurice went to see the Haldanes, and had a great deal of conversation with them. This conversation ran chiefly upon the one subject on which they were both so much interested—"the child." From them he learnt that Norah had "come out," that she had made a great *succès*, that everybody (to wit the Daltons) were raving of her prettiness and sprightliness, and how much admired she was; and that since the ball Cyril Rivers had "never been out of the house."

"Find out what sort of fellow he is, Maurice," said Stephen Haldane; "it would be hard to see our little Norah throw herself away. I thought it would have been Ned."

"Ned! Ned? Burton's son—a mere City fellow! Good heavens! has it come to that?" said Dr. Maurice.

He left the Gatehouse, and walked slowly to the station, and went home just about the time when the dance began on the green. "The child wants some one to take care of her," he said over and over again to himself. When he got home he went over all his house, and looked at it with a half comic, half puzzled look. The idea perhaps had gleaned across his mind before; it was an idea he did not half like. It would be a trouble to him—more trouble than anybody could imagine. But still if such a sacrifice should be necessary—for Norah's sake?

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE thought of revenge which had thus entered Helen's mind might have died out of it naturally, or it might have been overcome by better thoughts. All the passion and conflict of her life had died into stillness; six years had come and gone since the great storm had passed over her, which had changed her existence, and though that had not come to any satisfactory conclusion, but

only raged itself out, leaving germs that might grow into tumultuous life again—so long an interval of quiet had buried these germs very deep. She had grown tranquil in spite of herself; the calm routine of her life had taken hold upon her, and she had made that change which is so imperceptible while in progress, so real and all-influencing when once accomplished—the change which steals away the individuality of existence, and introduces that life by proxy, to which we all—or at least to which all women—must come. Insensibly, without knowing it, Helen had grafted herself into her child. She had lived for Norah, and now she lived in Norah, regarding the events of the world and the days as they passed solely in reference to the new creature who had a new career to weave out of them. This change has a wonderful effect upon the mind and being. Her sphere of interests was altered, her hopes and wishes were altered, her very modes of thought. The gravity of her nature gave way before this potent influence. Had she been in the way of it, Helen, who had lived through her own youth with a certain serious dignity, accepting her pleasures as a necessity rather than entering into them with enthusiasm, would have acquired for herself, no doubt, the character of a frivolous woman, fond of balls and gaiety, all because of the gayer temper of her child. She felt with Norah that thrill of wonder about Cyril Rivers; her own heart began to beat a little quicker when she heard him coming; a reflection of Norah's blush passed over her. She had to make an effort now and then not to be altogether carried away by this strange entry she had made into another nature; for Norah was not like her mother in nature; training and constant association had made them alike, and it was quite possible that Norah in later life might become Helen, as Helen for the moment had become Norah. But this wondrous double life that ebbs and flows from one heart to another as from one vessel to another—the same blood, the same soul—is not very explicable in words. It was only when Helen sat, as she did at the moment we are now describing, all by herself over her little fire, and felt the silence round her, and realised her own individuality separate from the rest of the world, that the old strain of her thoughts came back to her, and for half an hour at a time she became herself once more.

It was a month after the day of the picnic. The guests at Dura had departed, or rather had been succeeded by new ones, of whom

the Drummonds knew nothing. A breach had been made between the great house and the village—a breach which the Daltons murmured and wondered at, but which no one attributed distinctly to its true cause. That cause, Mrs. Drummond knew very well, was Norah. They had been invited once more to Dura after the picnic, and Mr. Rivers once more had constituted himself their attendant. By this time all other motives except one had ceased to influence the young man. He had ceased to think of the Burtons' claims or of Clara's fury—things which, no doubt, had at first made the pursuit of Norah piquant and attractive to him. What he thought of now was Norah herself. He had no intention of committing himself—no thought of compromising his future by a foolish match; but he fell in love—he could not help it. It is a thing which men of the best principles, men incapable of ruining themselves by an absurd marriage, will nevertheless do from time to time. How he should get out of it he did not know, and when he ventured to think at all, he was very sorry for himself for the fatality which made Norah impossible. But impossible or not, this was what had happened to him; he had fallen in love. The sensation itself was sweet; and Clara's perpetual angry pout, her flash of wrath when he approached Norah, her impatient exclamation at the sound of her name, amused him immensely, and at the same time flattered his vanity. So did Ned's lowering brows and unhappy looks. Mr. Rivers was tickled with his own position, flattered and amused by the effect his erratic proceedings had produced. And he had fallen in love. I am sorry to say that Mrs. Drummond encouraged him on that evening which she and her daughter spent at Dura after the picnic. She waved him, as it were, in the faces of the Burtons like a flag of triumph. She took pleasure in Ned's misery, though she liked Ned—and in Clara's wrath. They had scorned her child; but her child was able to turn all their plans to confusion, and break up their most skillful combinations. Norah was the queen of the moment, and the others were crushed under her little foot. She was able to make Ned's life a burden to him and destroy Clara's prospects. I am very sorry to have to say this of Helen; but I have never set her up as possessing the highest type of character, and it was true.

She was heartily sorry for it afterwards, however, it must be added. When she got home she felt ashamed, but rather for having done something that did not come up to her

own ideal of womanly or lady-like behaviour than for the pain she had helped to inflict. Even while she was sorry for having "encouraged" (women are so conscious of all that word means) Mr. Rivers, she was not sorry for Ned's despair, which rather amused her—nor for Clara's fury, which made her so angry that she would have liked to whip Clara. She was only ashamed of the deed; she did not dislike the results. Norah, as so often happens, did not know half, nor nearly half, of what it all meant. She was flattered by Mr. Rivers's attention; she admired him, she liked him. He was the hero, and he had taken her for his heroine. The thought entranced her girlish fancy, and seduced her into a thousand dreams. She wondered would he "speak" to her, and what should she answer him? She framed pictures to herself of how he should be brought to the very verge of that "speaking," and then by chance prevented and sent away, and longing and anxious, while Norah herself would get a respite. She imagined the most touching scenes—how somebody unknown would be found to watch over her, to bring wonderful good fortune to her, to be at hand when she was in any danger, to save her life, and perform all kinds of wonders; and how at last, suddenly turning upon this anonymous guardian angel, she should find that it was he. Everything that a true knight had ever done for his lady she dreamt of having done for her, and a sweet exultation, a grateful sense of her own humility and yet grandeur would fill her foolish little mind. But still, even in her fancy, Norah held as far off as possible the inevitable response. No lady, of course, could accept such devotion without sooner or later bestowing the reward; but the devotion, and not the reward, was the thing it pleased her to contemplate. It surrounded with a halo of glory not only herself, the recipient, but even in a higher degree the man who was capable of bestowing such exquisite, and delicate, and generous service. Such are the fantastic fancies of a girl when she finds herself wafted into the land of old romance by the astounding, delicious, incomprehensible discovery that some one has fallen in love with her. She was not in the very least in love with him.

All this is a long way from the November evening when Helen sat over her fire, and became for the periodical half-hour herself, and not simply Norah's mother. Thinking it all over, she blushed a little over her own conduct. Mr. Rivers had left Dura, but he kept writing to her on one absurd pretext

after another. Mrs. Drummond had answered very briefly one of these notes, and she was taking herself to task for it now. Was she right to "encourage" Cyril Rivers? It had punished the Burtons, and she was not sorry for that. But was such a mode of revenge permissible? Was it consistent with her own dignity, or such a thing as ought to be? Susan had not yet brought in the lamp, and she was sitting in the ruddy darkness, scarcely illuminated, yet made rosy by the brilliant not-flaming redness of the fire. Norah, even now, would have been frightened to sit so in that haunted room; but it was not haunted to Helen. It was a clear, moonlight evening out of doors, and the thin long lines of window at the other end of the room let in each a strip of dark wintry blue between the brown-grey curtains. This cold light, and the ruddy, suppressed glow of the fire, balanced each other, holding each their own half of the room like two armies, of which the red one made continual sorties upon the realm of the other, and the blue one stood fast without a movement. It was a curious little interior, but Helen did not see it. She sat, as thoughtful people so often sit, with her eyes fixed upon the red glow of the embers. In a variation of the same attitude, half visible as the light rose and fell, like a spell-bound woman, her image shone in the round mirror.

Norah was at the Rectory spending the evening, and Norah's mother had changed into Helen herself, and not another. How many old thoughts came and went through her mind it is needless to say; but they resolved themselves into this, that she had sacrificed her own dignity, that what she was doing was not the thing she ought to do. What was the punishment of the Burtons to her? Why should she like to give a heart-ache to a boy and girl who had done her no harm? It was to get at their father, and give him a stab through their means; but was that a kind of warfare for a woman—a lady? Helen started in the dark, though no one could see her. She had a high, almost fantastic, sense of honor and generosity, yet in this she was sacrificing both.

I do not know what impulse it was which made her, when the fire began to burn low and wanted refreshment, go to the window and look out—no reason in particular—because it was a beautiful night. She stood looking out on the moonlight, on the silent country road, and the lively lights which shone in the Rectory windows opposite. She had rung for the lamp; she was going to have her

woman's meal, her cup of tea, in the solitude which was not grievous, for to be sure it would last but an hour or two. On the table there was a basket full of work, some dress-making for Norah, and a novel, for still Helen loved the novels which took her into other lives. All these placid details gave an air of profoundest peace to the scene, and the white, clear moonlight shone outside, and the stars, sharpened and brightened by frost, fluttered as if they had wings or a heart that throbbed, out of the blue of the sky; when suddenly the place became clamorous, the silence fled, the echoes carried circles of sound all over the unseen country. Mr. Burton was coming home. A slight smile came upon Helen's face. All this ostentation and noise of wealth did not irritate her as it used to do. The phaeton came dashing along, and paused a moment at the corner, where Williams's shop threw out a stream of illumination. Some one else sat by Mr. Burton's side—some one who suddenly, as they passed, turned his face full into the light.

In a moment Helen's heart had begun to beat like an engine suddenly set in motion; the blood mounted up into her ears, to her heart, like its moving wheels and piston. She clenched her hand, and a sudden demon seemed to wake up and come into existence all in a moment. It was the man whom she believed to be her husband's murderer—the destroyer of her own happiness and of Robert's good name. She stood as if spell-bound while they drove past the window, laughing and talking. Nay, there was even a half pause, and Mr. Burton made some explanation, and pointed to the Gatehouse, not seeing the secret spectator. She heard the sound of their voices—the laugh; and clenched her hands tighter, and through her mind there passed words which a woman should not say.

It was then that Susan came into the room with the lamp. When she had set it down on the table, and turned round to close the window, it startled her to see where Helen was standing. Susan uttered an exclamation; it gave her "a turn;" and she had a still greater turn when she perceived the change in Mrs. Drummond's face. But for the moment she did not say anything. It was only when she had arranged the tea and put everything ready that she ventured to look again, and encountered Helen's eyes, which were fixed, and did not see her.

"Lord bless us!" said Susan, "if something has happened, 'm, don't look dreadful like that, but say it out."



"'MAMMA, MRS HAS WALKED ACROSS WITH ME,' SAID MORAN, RUNNING IN ALL FRESH FROM THE OUTER AIR, WITH A RED HOOD OVER HER BROWN HAIR."—(See page 156.)

Helen woke up at the sound of her voice. She tried to smile and clear her countenance.

"Nothing has happened," she said ; and it startled her to find how hoarse she was. "I was thinking only about old times."

"That comes o' Miss Norah being out to tea," said Susan. "I'd think of old times fast enough if I could do any good. But what's the use? Thinking and thinking only moiders a body's brain. I've give it up for my part."

"It is the wisest way," said Helen, trying to smile.

"Shall I ask Miss Jane to come and stay with you a bit? or shall I run for Miss Norah?" asked Susan, who was practical-minded, and felt that something ought to be done.

"Never mind, Susan. It is very kind of you to think of me. It will pass over directly," said Helen ; and she was so decided and imperative that Susan was forced to yield.

When she was gone, Mrs. Drummond rose and walked about the room with hasty, tremulous steps. She was not sick nor sorry, as the woman thought, but burning with wild indignation, sudden rage. Her better feelings were overwhelmed by the tide of passion that rushed into her mind. "Golden and Burton! Golden and Burton!" When she had last repeated these words, she had felt herself powerless, helpless, unable to inflict any punishment upon them, compelled to subside into silence, knowing that neither her voice nor anything she could do would reach them. It was different now, she said to herself, with fierce satisfaction. Now she had indeed something in her power ; now she could indeed reach the very heart of one of them. Her cheek glowed, her eyes blazed in her solitude. She would do it. She would abstract Mr. Rivers from them utterly, and she would break the heart of their boy. She seemed to hold it in her hand, and crush it, as she pursued these thoughts. This was the horrible effect produced upon a reasonable woman by the appearance of a man who had wronged her. It is not easy to bear the seeming prosperity of the wicked. He had taken from Helen all, except Norah, that made life worth having, and he himself had appeared to her full of jovial talk and laughter, going to visit at Dura, evidently a favored guest. The difficulty was one which David felt even more deeply, and has argued with himself upon in many a strain which religion has made familiar to us as the air we breathe. In the Psalms it is never said that it is wrong to chafe at the prosperity of

evil-doers, but only that that prosperity is short-lived, and that ruin is coming. When Helen suddenly saw her enemy, the wicked man *par excellence*, the incarnation of wrong and cruelty, flourishing like the green bay-tree, gay and confident as he had always been, it was not wonderful if she took the Old Testament rather than the New for her guide. The only strange thing was, that with the curious inconsistency of human nature, she grasped the weapon that she had suddenly found at her side, to strike, not him, but his companion. Golden and Burton! Once more they had become one to her ; her enemies—the incarnation of murder, slander, and wrong!

"Mamma, Ned has walked across with me," said Norah, running in all fresh from the outer air, with a red hood over her brown hair. "May I ask him to come in? He looks so unhappy, mamma."

"I don't see that we have anything to do with his unhappiness," said Helen ; but already he was standing at the door, looking in very wistfully. Norah was rather wistful, too ; her heart was relenting over her old vassal ; and now there was no Mr. Rivers in the way to take possession of her, and come between her and the looks of others.

Ned came in with very doubtful step, not knowing whether to be frightened or glad. He was not afraid of Mrs. Drummond ; she had never been unkind to him, and there seemed a possibility now that his misery might be over, and that Norah might relent. But it was a shock to Ned to find that she did not offer him her hand, but only bowed stiffly, and began to speak to her daughter.

"You are early to-night," she said. "I did not expect you so soon."

"Oh, mamma, soon! Why, it is eleven ; and you have the tea-things still on the table. Mamma, I shall never be able to go anywhere, if you behave so. You have not had any tea."

"I have not wanted it. I did not observe that it was there," said Helen, seating herself on her former seat by the fire. In doing this, she turned her back upon Ned, who, startled and wounded, did not know what to do. Norah was alarmed too. She made a sign to him to sit down, and then went to her mother, taking her hand.

"Mamma, you are not well," she said.

"I am quite well. I fear, however, I shall not be good company for—Mr. Burton to-night."

"Mamma! Why, it is only Ned!"

"He is Mr. Burton's son," said Helen,

trembling with emotion. "Norah, do you remember the man who murdered your father, and tried to disgrace him—Golden—that man? Well, I have just seen him drive up with Mr. Burton to Dura. They paused, and pointed out this house to each other—the place where their victims were living. You may understand why I am not fit company for—Mr. Burton to-night."

"Oh, my poor, dear mother! have you had this to bear, with no one to support you? I will never go out and leave you again."

"The sight of his face is like a curse to me," said Helen, scarcely knowing what she said. "I have had as much as I can bear for one night."

"Yes, dear mamma, so you have," said soothing Norah. And then behind her mother's back she made an imperative sign to poor Ned, whispering, "Go away; go away!"

He stumbled up to his feet, poor fellow! so dreadfully disappointed that he could scarcely find voice enough to speak. But yet his instinct was to strike one blow in self-defence.

"Mrs. Drummond," he said, clearing his voice, "I don't know much about Mr. Golden; but if he is such a man as you say, my father must be deceived; and I have nothing at all to do with it. Is it fair to punish me?"

"Oh, your father!" said Helen, facing suddenly round upon him, with a flush on her face and the tremulous movement of passion in all her frame. If she had not been so agitated, she would not have spoken so, let us hope, to the man's son. "Your father is not deceived. I don't say you know. But you are his son."

"Good evening, Norah!" said Ned: he crushed his hat between his hands, and went straight out without another word. What a change from the hopeful spirit in which he had crossed the threshold two minutes before! But like many a man who makes an abrupt retreat, Ned found he fared the worse for his impetuosity when he had got outside. He might have stayed and asked some questions about it, fathomed it somehow, tried to discover what was the meaning of it. He walked up the avenue, upon which the moon was shining bright, so confused and troubled that he could not tell certainly which was the cloud floating along at a

breakneck pace before the wind and which the true shadows, themselves immovable, which his rapid progress made almost as wildly fugitive. He thought he had been on the eve of renewed happiness, and lo! now he found himself pushed further off than ever; repulsed, he could not tell how. A tide of wild fancy rushed through his mind, carrying a hundred thoughts upon it as the wind carried the cloud. Sometimes it was the image of Mrs. Drummond which was uppermost, sometimes a wondering puzzled question about his father, sometimes the name of Golden. He remembered dimly the trial and the comments upon the latter, and how his own young mind had glowed half with indignation, half with sympathy. He was better able to judge now; but Helen's language sounded violent and exaggerated to him. "The man who murdered your father"—"the sight of his face is like a curse." What language was this for any one in their senses to use?

A stormy night with a full moon is perhaps the most dramatic spectacle in nature. The world was flooded with light as Ned, a dark speck in all that whiteness, came out into the open lawns amid which his father's house stood. The wind was driving the clouds across the clear blue at such a desperate pace as might become the pursued and terrified stragglers of a great army; and the army itself, piled up in dark confused masses in the north, loomed behind the house of Dura, which was inundated by the white radiance. These angry forces were turning to bay, heaping themselves in a threatening mass, glooming in silent opposition to all the splendour and glory of the light. Ned's heart was so sick and sore that he gazed at this sight with unusual force of fancy, wondering if it could mean anything? The moon and the wind were doing all they could to disperse these vapours; they were driven back upon each other, heaped up in masses, pursued off the face of the sky, which over Ned's head was blue and clear as a summer noon. But yet the clouds gathered, held together, stood, as it were, at bay. Did it mean anything? Was that storm about to burst over the house, which stood so tranquilly, whitened over by the moon, below. This was what Ned asked himself (though he was not usually imaginative) as he went in with an ache in his heart to his father's house.

PART X



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE drawing-room within was very different from the wild conflict of light and darkness outside. There was music going on at one end, some people were reading, some talking. There were flirtations in hand, and grave discussions. In short, the evening was being spent as people are apt to spend the evening when there is nothing particular going on. There had been a good deal of private yawning and inspection of watches throughout the evening, and some of the party had already gone to bed, or rather to their rooms, where they could indulge in the happiness of fancying themselves somewhere else—an amusement which is very popular and general in a country house.

But seated in an easy chair by the fire was a tall man, carefully dressed, with diamond studs in his shirt, and a toilette which, though subdued in tone as a gentleman's evening-dress must be, was yet too elaborate for the occasion. The fact that this new guest was

a stranger to him, and that his father was seated by him in close conversation, made it at once apparent to Ned that it must be Golden. Clara was close to them listening with a look of eager interest to all they said. These three made a little detached group by one side of the fire. At the other corner sat Mrs. Burton, with her little feet on a footstool, as near as possible to the fender. She had just said good-night to the dignified members of the party, the people who had to be considered; the others who remained were mere young people, about whose proceedings she did not concern herself. She was taking no part in the talk at the other side of the fire. She sat and warmed her little toes and pondered; her vivid little mind all astir and working, but uninfluenced by, and somewhat contemptuous of, what was going on around; and her chilly little person basking in the ruddy warmth of the fire.

Ned came up and stood by her when he came in. No one took any notice of him, the few persons who remained in the room

having other affairs in hand. Ned was fond of his mother, though she had never shown any fondness for him. She had done all for him which mere intellect could do. She had been very just to the boy all his life; when he got into scrapes, as boys will, she had not backed him up emotionally, it is true, but she had taken all the circumstances into account, and had not judged him harshly. She had been tolerant when his father was harsh. She had never lost her temper. He had always felt that he could appeal to her sense of justice—to her calm and impartial reason. This is not much like the confidence with which a boy generally throws himself upon his mother's sympathy, yet it was a great deal in Ned's case. And accordingly he loved his mother. Mrs. Burton, too, loved him perhaps more than she loved any one. She was doing her best to break his heart; but that is not at all uncommon even when parents and children adore each other. And then Ned was not aware that his mother had any share intentionally or otherwise in the cruel treatment he had received.

"Who is that?" he asked under his breath.

"A Mr. Golden, a friend of your father's," said Mrs. Burton, lifting her eyes and turning them calmly upon the person she named. There was no feeling in them of one kind or another, and yet Ned felt that she at least did not admire Mr. Golden, and it was a comfort to him. He went forward to the fire, and placed himself, as an Englishman loves to do, in front of it. He stood there for ten minutes or so, paying no particular attention to the conversation on his right hand. His father, however, looked more animated than he had done for a long time, and Clara was bending forward with a faint rose-tint from the fire tingling the whiteness of her forehead and throat, and deeper roses glowing on her cheeks. Her blue eyes were following Mr. Golden's movements as he spoke, her hair was shining like crisp gold in the light. She was such a study of colour, of splendid flesh and blood, as Rubens would have worshipped; and Mr. Golden had discrimination enough to perceive it. He stopped to address himself to Clara. He turned to her, and gave her looks of admiration, for which her brother, bitterly enough biassed against him on his own account, could have "throttled the fellow!" Ned grew more and more wrathful as he looked on. And in the meantime the late young ladies came fluttering to say good-night to their hostess; the young men went off to the smoking-room, where Ned knew he ought to accompany them, but did not, being

too fully occupied; and thus the family were left alone. Notwithstanding, however, his wrath and his curiosity, it was only the sound of one name which suddenly made the conversation by his side quite articulate and intelligible to Ned.

"I hear the Drummond has a pretty daughter; that is a new weapon for her, Burton. I wonder you venture to have such a family established at your gates."

"The daughter is not particularly pretty; not so pretty by a long way as Helen was," said Mr. Burton. "I don't see what harm she can do with poor little Norah. We are not afraid of her, Clara, are we?" and he looked admiringly at his daughter, and laughed.

As for Clara she grew crimson. She was not a girl of much feeling, but still there was something of the woman in her.

"I don't understand how we could be supposed to be afraid for Norah Drummond," she said.

"But I assure you I do," said Mr. Golden. "Pardon me, but I don't suppose you have seen the Drummond herself, the Drummond mamma—in a fury."

"Father," said Ned, "is Mr. Golden aware that the lady he is speaking of is our relation—and friend? Do you mean to suffer her to be so spoken of in your house?"

"Hold your tongue, Ned."

"Ned! to be sure it is Ned. Why, my boy, you have grown out of all recollection," said Golden, jumping up with a great show of cordiality, and holding out his hand.

Ned bowed, and drew a step nearer his mother. He had his hands in his pockets; there were times, no doubt, when his manners left a great deal to be desired.

"Ah, I see! there are spells," said Mr. Golden, and he took his seat again with a hearty laugh—a laugh so hearty that there seemed just a possibility of strain and forced merriment in it. "My dear Miss Burton," he said, in an undertone, which however Ned could hear, "didn't I tell you there was danger? Here's an example for you, sooner than I thought."

"Mother," said Ned, "can I get your candle? I am sure it is time for you to go up-stairs."

"Yes, and for Clara too. Run away, child, and take care of your roses; Golden and I have some business to talk over; run away. As for you, Ned, to-morrow morning I shall have something to say to you."

"Very well, sir," said Ned solemnly.

He lighted his mother's candle, and he gave

her his arm, having made up his mind not to let her go. The sounds of laughter which came faintly from the smoking-room did not tempt him; if truth must be told, they tempted Clara much more, who stood for a moment with her candle in her hand, and said to herself, "What fun they must be having!" and fretted against the feminine fetters which bound her. Such a thought would not have come into Norah's head, nor into Katie Dalton's, nor even into that of Lady Florizel, though it was a foolish little head enough; but Clara, who was all flesh and blood, and had been badly brought up, was the one of those four girls who probably would have impressed most deeply a journalist's fancy as illustrating the social problem of English young womanhood.

Ned led his mother not to her own room, but to his. He made her come in and placed a chair for her before the fire. It is probable that he had sense enough to feel that had he asked her consent to his marriage with Norah Drummond he would have found difficulties in his way; but short of this, he had full confidence in the justice which indeed he had never had any reason to doubt.

"Do you like this man Golden, mother?" he asked. "Tell me, what is his connection with us?"

"His connection, I suppose, is a business connection with your father," said Mrs. Burton. "For the rest, I neither like him nor hate him. He is well enough, I suppose, in his way."

"Mrs. Drummond does not think so," said Ned.

"Ah, Mrs. Drummond! She is a woman of what are called strong feelings. I don't suppose she ever stopped to inquire into the motives of anybody who went against her in her life. She jumps at a conclusion, and reaches it always from her own point of view. According to her view of affairs, I don't wonder, with her disposition, that she should hate him."

"Why, mother?"

"Well," said Mrs. Burton, "I am not in the habit of using words which would come naturally to a mind like Mrs. Drummond's. But from her point of view, I should say, she must believe that he ruined her husband—drove him to suicide, and then did all he could to ruin his reputation. These are things, I allow, which people do not readily forget."

"And, mother, do you believe all this? Is it true?"

"I state it in a different way," she said.

"Mr. Golden, I suppose, thought the business could be redeemed, to start with. When he drew poor Mr. Drummond into active work in the concern, he did it in a moment when there was nobody else to refer to. And then you must remember, Ned, that Mr. Drummond had enjoyed a good deal of profit, and had as much right as any of the others to suffer in the loss. He was ignorant of business, to be sure, and did not know what he was doing; but then an ignorant man has no right to go into business. Mr. Golden is very sharp, and he had to preserve himself if he could. It was quite natural he should take advantage of the other's foolishness. And then I don't suppose he ever imagined that poor Mr. Drummond would commit suicide. He himself would never have done it under similar circumstances—nor your father."

"Had my father anything to do with this?" said Ned hoarsely.

"That is not the question," said Mrs. Burton. "But neither the one nor the other would have done anything so foolish. How were they to suppose Mr. Drummond would? This sort of thing requires a power of realizing other people's ways of thinking which few possess, Ned. After he was dead, and it could not be helped, I don't find anything surprising," she went on, putting her feet nearer the fire, "in the fact that Mr. Golden turned it to his advantage. It could not hurt Drummond any more, you know. Of course it hurt his wife's feelings; but I am not clear how far Golden was called upon to consider the feelings of Drummond's wife. It was a question of life and death for himself. Of course, I do not believe for a moment, and I don't suppose anybody whose opinion is worth considering, could believe that a poor, innocent, silly man destroyed those books——"

"Mother, I don't know what you are speaking of; but it seems to me as if you were describing the most devilish piece of villany——"

"People do employ such words, no doubt," said Mrs. Burton calmly; "I don't myself. But if that is how it appears to your mind, you are right enough to express yourself so. Of course, that is Mrs. Drummond's opinion. I have something to say to you about the Drummonds, Ned."

"One moment, mother," he cried, with a tremor and heat of excitement which puzzled her perhaps more than anything she had yet met with in the matter. For why should Ned be disturbed by a thing which did not

concern him, and which had happened so long ago? "You have mentioned my father. You have said *they*, speaking of this man's infamous—— Was my father concerned?"

Mrs. Burton turned, and looked her son in the face. The smallest little ghost of agitation—a shadow so faint that it would not have showed upon any other face—glided over hers.

"That is just the point on which I can give you least information," she said; and then, after a pause, "Ned," she continued, "you are grown up; you are capable of judging for yourself. I tell you I don't know. I am not often deterred by any cause from following out a question I am interested in; but I have preferred not to follow up this. I put away all the papers, thinking I might some day care to go into it more deeply. You can have them if you like. To tell the truth," she added, sinking her voice, betrayed into a degree of confidence which perhaps she had never given to human creature before, "I think it is a bad sign that this man has come back."

"A sign of what?"

Mrs. Burton's agitation increased. Though it was the very slightest of agitation, it startled Ned, so unlike was it to his mother.

"Ned," she said, with a shiver that might be partly cold, "nobody that I ever heard of is so strong as their own principles. I do not know, if it came to me to have to bear it, whether I could bear ruin and disgrace."

"Ruin and disgrace!" cried Ned.

"I don't know if I have fortitude enough. Perhaps I could by myself; I should feel that it was brought about by natural means, and that blame was useless and foolish. But if we had to bear the comments in the newspapers, the talk of everybody, the reflections on our past, I don't know whether I have fortitude to bear it; I feel as if I could not."

"Mother, has this been in your mind, while I have been thinking you took so little interest? My poor little mamma!"

The wicked little woman! And yet all that she had been saying was perfectly true.

"Ned," she said, with great seriousness, "this dread, which I can never get quite out of my mind, is the reason why I have been so very earnest about the Merewethers. I have never, you know, supported your father's wish that you should go into the business. On the contrary, I have always endeavoured to secure you your own career. I have wished that you at least should be safe——"

"Safe!" he cried. "Mother, if there is a possibility of disgrace, how can I, how can

any of us, escape from it—and more especially I? And if there is a chance of ruin, why I should be as great a villain as that man is, should I consent to carry it into another house."

"It is quite a different case," she cried with some eagerness, seeing she had over-shot her mark. "I hope there will be neither; and you have not the least reason to suppose that either is possible. Look round you; go with your father to the office, inspect his concerns as much as you please; you will see nothing but evidences of prosperity. So far as you know, or can know, your father is one of the most prosperous men in England. Nobody would have a word to say against you, and I shall be rich enough to provide for you. If there is any downfall at all, which I do not expect, nobody would ever imagine for a moment that you knew anything of it; and your career and your comfort would be safe."

"O mother! mother!" Poor Ned turned away from her and hid his face in his hands. This was worse to him than all the rest.

"You ought to think it over most carefully," she said; "all this is perfectly clear before you. I may have taken fright, though it is not very like me. I may be fanciful enough" (Mrs. Burton smiled at herself, and even Ned in his misery half smiled) "to consider this man as a sort of raven, boding misfortune. But you know nothing about it; there is abundant time for you to save yourself and your credit; and this is the wish which, above everything in the world, I have most at heart, that, if there is going to be any disaster—I don't expect it, I don't believe in it; but mercantile men are always subject to misfortune—you might at least be safe. I will not say anything more about it to-night; but think it over, Ned."

She rose as she spoke and took up her candle, and her son bent over her and touched her little cold face with his hot lips. "I will send you the papers," she said as she went away. Strange little shadow of a mother! She glided along the passage, not without a certain maternal sentiment—a feeling that on the whole she was doing what was best for her boy. *She* could provide for him, whatever happened; and if evil came he might so manage as to thrust himself out from under the shadow of the evil. She was a curious problem, this woman; she could enter into Mr. Golden's state of mind, but not into her son's. She could fathom those struggles of self-preservation which might lead a man into fraud and robbery; but she could not enter into

those which tore a generous, sensitive, honourable soul in pieces. She was an analyst, with the lowest view of human nature, and not a sympathetic being entering into the hearts of others by means of her own.

No smoking-room, no jovial midnight party, received Ned that night. He sat up till the slow November morning dawned reading those papers; and then he threw himself on his bed, and hid his face from the cold increasing light. A bitterness which he could not put into words, which even to himself it was impossible to explain, filled his heart. There was nothing, or at least very little, about his father in these papers. There was no accusation made against Mr. Burton, nothing that any one could take hold of—only here and there a word of ominous suggestion which chilled the blood in his veins. But Golden's character was not spared by any one; it came out in all its blackness, more distinct even than it could have done at the moment these events occurred. Men had read the story at the time with their minds full of foregone conclusions on the subject—of prejudices and the heat of personal feeling. But to Ned it was history; and as he read, Golden's character stood out before him as in a picture. And this man, this deliberate cold-blooded scoundrel was sleeping calmly under his father's roof—a guest whom his father delighted to honour. Ned groaned, and covered his eyes with his hands to shut out the hazy November morning, as if it were a spy that might find out something from his haggard countenance. Sleep was far from his eyes; his brain buzzed with the unaccustomed crowd of thoughts that whirled and rustled through it. A hundred projects, all very practicable at the first glance and impossible afterwards, flashed before him. The only thing that he never thought of was that which his mother had called the wish of her heart—that he should escape and secure his own career out of the possible fate that might be impending. This, of all projects, was the only one which, first and last, was impossible to Ned.

The first step which he took in the matter was one strangely different. He had to go through all the ordinary remarks of the breakfast-table upon his miserable looks; but he was too much agitated to be very well aware what people were saying to him. He watched anxiously till he saw his father prepare to leave the house. Fortunately Mr. Golden was not with him. Mr. Golden was a man of luxury, who breakfasted late, and had not so much as made his appearance at

the hour when Mr. Burton, who above everything, was a man of business, started for the station. Ned went out with him, avoiding his mother's eye. He took from his father's hand a little courier's bag full of papers which he was taking with him.

"I will carry it for you, sir," he said.

Mr. Burton was intensely surprised; the days were long gone by when Ned would strut by his side, putting out his chest in imitation of his father.

"Wants some money, I suppose!" Mr. Burton—no longer the boy's proud progenitor, but a wary parent, awake to all the possible snares and traps which are set for such—said to himself.

They had reached the village before Ned had begun to speak of anything more important than the weather or the game. Then he broke into his subject quite abruptly.

"Father," he said, "within the last few days I have been thinking of a great many things. I have been thinking that for your only son to set his face against business was hard lines on you. Will you tell me frankly whether a fellow like me, trained so differently, would be of real use to you? Could I help you to keep things straight, save you from being cheated?—do anything for you? I have changed my ideas on a great many subjects. This is what I want to know."

"Upon my word a wonderful conversion," said his father with a laugh; "there must be some famous reason for a change so sudden. Help me to keep things straight!—Keep me from being cheated! You simpleton! you have at least a capital opinion of yourself."

"But it was with that idea, I suppose, that you thought of putting me into the business," said Ned, overcoming with an effort his first boyish impulse of offence.

"Perhaps in the long-run," said Mr. Burton jocularly; "but not all at once, my fine fellow. Your Greek and your Latin won't do you much service in the city, my boy. Though you have taken your degree—and a deuced deal of money, that costs, a great deal more than it's worth—you would have to begin by singing very small in the office. You would be junior clerk to begin with at fifty pounds a year. How should you find that suit your plans, my fine gentleman, Ned?"

"Was that all you intended me for?" asked Ned sternly. A rigid air and tone was the best mask he could put upon his bitter mortification.

"Certainly, at first," said Mr. Burton; "but I have changed my mind altogether on

the subject," he added sharply. "I see that I was altogether deceived in you. You never would be of any use in business. If you were in Golden's hands, perhaps—but you have let yourself be influenced by some wretched fool or other."

"Has Mr. Golden anything to say to your business?" asked Ned.

The question took his father by surprise.

"Confound your impudence!" he cried, after a keen glance at his son and sputter of confused words, which sounded very much like swearing. "What has given you so sudden an interest in my business, I should like to know? Do you think I am too old to manage it for myself?"

"It was the sight of this man, father," said Ned, with boyish simplicity and earnestness, "and the knowledge who he was. Couldn't I serve you instead of him? I pledge you my word to give up all that you consider nonsense, to settle steadily to business. I am not a fool, though I am ignorant. And then if I am ignorant, no man could serve you so truly as your son would, whose interests are the same as yours. Try me! I could serve you better than he."

"You preposterous idiot!" cried Mr. Burton, who had made two or three changes from anger to ridicule while this speech was being delivered. "You serve me better than Golden!—Golden, by Jove! And may I ask if I were to accept this splendid offer of yours, what would you expect as an equivalent? My consent to some wretched marriage or other, I suppose, allowance doubled, home provided, and my blessing, eh? I suppose that is what you are aiming at. Out with it—how much was the equivalent to be?"

"Nothing," said Ned. He had grown crimson; his eyes were cast down, not to betray the feeling in them—a choking sensation was in his throat. Then he added slowly—"not even the fifty pounds a year you offered me just now—nothing but permission to stand by you, to help to—keep danger off."

Mr. Burton took the bag roughly out of his hand. "Go home," he said, "you young ass; and be thankful I don't chastise you for your impudence. Danger!—I should think you were the danger if you were not such a fool. Go home! I don't desire your further company. A pretty help and defender you would be!"

And Ned found himself suddenly standing alone outside the station, his fingers tingling with the roughness with which the bag had been snatched from him. He

stood still for half a minute, undecided, and then he turned round and strolled listlessly back along the street. He was very unhappy. His father was still his father, though he had begun to distrust, and had long given over expecting any sympathy from him. And the generous resolution which it had cost him so much pain to make, had not only come to nothing, but had been trampled under foot with derision. His heart was very sore. It was a hazy morning, with a frosty, red sun trying hard to break through the mist; and everything moved swiftly to resist the cold, and every step rang sharp upon the road; except poor Ned's, who had not the heart to do anything but saunter listlessly and slowly, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes fixed wistfully upon nothing. Everything in a moment had become blank to him. He wondered why the people took the trouble to take off their hats to him—to one who was the heir of misery and perhaps of disgrace and ruin, as his mother had said. Ruin and disgrace! What awful words they are when you come to think of it—dreadful to look forward to, and still more dreadful to bear if any man could ever realize their actual arrival to himself!

Norah was standing at the open door of the Gatehouse. He thought for a moment that he would pass without taking any notice; and then it occurred to him in a strange visionary way that it might be the last time he should see her. He stopped, and she said a cold little "Good morning" to him, without even offering her hand. Then a sudden yearning seized poor Ned.

"Norah," he said, in that listless way, "I wish you would say something kind to me to-day. I don't know why I should be so anxious for it, but I think it would do me good. If you knew how unhappy I am——"

"Oh Ned, for heaven's sake don't talk such nonsense," cried impatient Norah. "You unhappy, that never knew what it was to have anything go wrong! It makes me quite ill to hear you. You that have got everything that heart can desire; because you can't just exactly have your own way—about—me— Oh, go away; I cannot put up with such nonsense—and to me, too, that knows what real trouble means!"

Poor Ned made no protest against this impatient decision. He put on his hat in a bewildered way, with one long look at her, and then passed, and disappeared within his father's gates. Norah did not know what to make of it. She stood at the door, bewildered



too, ready to wave her hand and smile at him when he looked round; but he never looked round. He went on slowly, listlessly, as if he did not care for anything—doing what both had told him—the father whom he had been willing to give up his life to—the girl who had his heart.

That afternoon he carried out their commands still more fully. He went away from his father's house. On a visit, it was said; but to go away on a visit in the middle of the shooting season, when your father's house is full of guests, was, all the young men thought, the most extraordinary thing which, even in the freedom of the nineteenth century, an only son, deputy master of the establishment, had ever been known to do.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was a long time before it was fully understood in Dura what had become of Ned. At first it was said he had gone on a visit, then that he had joined some of his college friends in an expedition abroad; but before spring it began to be fully understood, though nobody could tell how, that Ned had gone off from his home, and that though occasional letters came from him, his family

did not always know where he was or what he was about. There was no distinct authority for this, but the whole neighbourhood became gradually aware of it. The general idea was that he had gone away because Norah Drummond had refused him; and the consequence was that Norah Drummond was looked upon with a certain mixture of disapproval and envy by the youthful community. The girls felt to their hearts the grandeur of her position. Some were angry, taking Ned's part, and declaring vehemently that she had "led him on;" some were sympathetic, feeling that poor Norah was to be pitied for the tragical necessity of dismissing a lover; but all felt the proud distinction she had acquired by thus driving a man (they did not say boy) to despair. The boys, for the most part, condemned Ned as a muff—but in their hearts felt a certain pride in him, as proving that their side was still capable of a great act of decision and despair. As for Norah, when the news burst upon her, her kind little heart was broken. She cried till her pretty eyes were like an old woman's. She gave herself a violent headache, and turned away from all consolation, and denounced herself as the wickedest and cruelest of beings. It was na-

ural that Norah should believe it implicitly. After that scene in the Rectory garden, when poor Ned, in his boyish passion, had half-brown the responsibility of his life upon her shoulders, there had been other scenes of a not unsimilar kind; and there was that last meeting at the door of the Gatehouse, when he had dismissed him so summarily. Oh, if he had only looked round, Norah thought; and she remembered, with a passing gleam of consolation, that she had intended to wave her hand to him. "What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" she said, "if—anything should happen to him, mamma, I shall have killed him! If anybody calls me a murderess, I shall not have a word to say."

"Not so bad as that, my darling," Helen said, soothing her; but Helen herself was very deeply moved. This was the revenge, the punishment she had dreamt of. By her means, whom he had injured so deeply, Reginald Burton's only son had been driven away from him, and all his hopes and plans for his boy brought to a sudden end. It was revenge; but the revenge was not sweet. Christianity, heaven knows, has not done all for us which it might have done, but yet it has so far changed the theories of existence that the vague craving of the sufferer for punishment to its oppressors gives little gratification when it is fulfilled. Helen was humbled to the dust with remorse and compunction for the passing thought, which could scarcely be called an intention, the momentary, visionary sense of triumph she had felt in her daughter's power (as she believed) to disturb all the plans of the others. Now that was done which it had given her a vague triumph to think of; and though her tears were not so near the surface as Norah's, her shame and pain were deeper. And this was all the more the fact because she dared not express it. A word of sympathy from her (she felt) would have looked like nothing so much as the waving of a flag of triumph. And, besides, from Ned's own family there came no word of complaint.

The Dura people put the very best face upon it possible. Mrs. Burton, who had never been known to show any emotion in her life, of course made none of her feelings visible. Her husband declared that "my young fool of a son" preferred amusing himself abroad to doing any work at home. Clara was the only one who betrayed herself. She assured Katie Dalton, in confidence, that she never could bear to see that hateful Norah again—that she was sure it was all her fault. That Ned would never have looked at her had not she everything in her power to "draw him

on"—and then cast him off because somebody better worth having came in her way. Clara's indignation was sharp and vehement. It was edged with her own grievance, which she was not too proud to refer to in terms which could not disguise her feelings. But she was the only one of her house who allowed that Ned's disappearance had any significance. His mother said nothing at all on the subject even to her husband and her child; but in reality it was the severest blow that fate had ever aimed at her. Her hopes for his "career" toppled over like a house of cards. The Merewethers, astounded at the apology which had to be sent in reply to their invitation to Ned for Christmas, suddenly slackened in their friendship. Lady Florizel ceased to write to Clara, and the Marchioness sent no more notes, weighted with gilded coronets, to her dear Mrs. Burton. So far as that noble household was concerned, Ned's prospects had come to an end. The son of so rich a man, future proprietor of Dura, might have been accepted had he been on the spot to press his suit; but the Ladies Merewether were young and fair, and not so poor as to be pressed upon any one. So Lady Florizel and the parliamentary influence sunk into the background; and keenly to the intellectual machine, which served Mrs. Burton instead of a heart, went the blow. This was the moment, she felt, in which Ned could have made himself "safe," and disentangled himself from the fatal web which instinct told her her husband was weaving about his feet. There was no confidence on business matters between Mr. Burton and his wife; but a woman cannot be a man's constant companion for twenty years without divining him, and understanding, without the aid of words, something of what is going on in his mind. She had felt, even before Golden's arrival, a certain vague sense of difficulty and anxiety. His arrival made her sure of it. He had been abroad, withdrawn from the observation of English mercantile society for all these years; but his talents as the pilot of a ship, desperately making way through rocks and sandbanks, were sufficiently well known; and his appearance was confirmation sure to Mrs. Burton of all her fears. Thus she felt in her reticent, silent breast that her boy had thrown up his only chance. The son of the master of Dura could have done so much—the son of a bankrupt could do nothing. He might have withdrawn himself from all risk—established himself in a sure position—had he taken her advice; and he had not taken it. It was the hardest personal blow she had ever received.

It did not move her to tears, as it would have done most women. She had not that outlet for her sorrow; but it disarranged the intellectual machinery for the moment, and made her feel incapable of more thinking or planning. Even her motherhood had thus its anguish, probably as deep an anguish as she was capable of feeling. She was balked once more—her labor was in vain, and her hopes in vain. She had more mind than all of her family put together, and she knew it; but here once more, as so often in her experience, the fleshly part in which she was so weak, overrode the mind, and brought its counsels to nought. It would be hard to estimate the kind and degree of suffering which such a conviction brought.

Time went on, however, as it always does; stole on, while people were thinking of other things, discussing Ned's disappearance and Norah's remorse, and Mr. Nicholas's hopes of a living, and Mary's trousseau. When the first faint glimmer of the spring began, they had another thing to talk of, which was that Cyril Rivers had appeared on the scene again, often coming down from London to spend a day, and then so ingratiating himself with the Rectory people, and even with Nicholas, the bridegroom elect, that now and then he was asked to spend a night. This time, however, he was not invited to the great house; neither would Mrs. Drummond ask him, though he was constantly there. She was determined that nobody should say she drew him on this time, people said. But the fact was that Helen's heart was sick of the subject altogether, and that she would have gone out of her way to avoid any one who had been connected with the Burtons, or who might be supposed to minister to that revenge of which she was so bitterly ashamed. While Cyril Rivers went and came to Dura village, Mr. Golden became an equally frequent visitor at the House. The city men in the white villas had been filled with consternation at the first sight of him; but latterly began to make stiff returns to his hearty morning salutations when he went up to town along with them. It was so long ago; and nothing positively had been proved against him; and it was hard, they said, to crush a man altogether, who, possibly, was trying to amend his ways. Perhaps they would have been less charitable had he been living anywhere else than at the great house. Gradually, however, his presence became expected in Dura; he was always there when there were guests or festivities going on. And never had the Burtons been so gay. They seemed to celebrate their

son's departure by a double rush of dissipation. The idea of any trouble being near so pleasant, so brilliant a place was ridiculous, and whatever Mrs. Burton's thoughts on the subject might have been, she said nothing, but sent out her invitations, and assembled her guests with her usual calm. The Rectory people were constantly invited, and so indeed were the Drummonds, though neither Norah nor her mother had the heart to go.

Things were in this gay and festive state when Mr. Baldwin suddenly one morning paid his daughter a visit. It was not one of his usual visits, accompanied by the two aunts, and the old man-servant and the two maids. These visits had grown rarer of late. Mrs. Burton had so many guests, and of such rank, that to arrange the days for her father on which the minister of the chapel could be asked to dinner, and a plain joint provided, grew more and more difficult; while the old people grew more and more alarmed and indignant at the way Clara was going on. "Her dress alone must cost a fortune," her aunt Louisa said. "And the boy brought up as if he were a young Lord; and the girl never to touch a needle nor an account-book in her life," said Mrs. Everest; and they all knew by experience that to "speak to" Clara was quite futile. "She will take her own way, brother, whatever you say," was the verdict of both; and Mr. Baldwin knew it was a true one. Nevertheless, there came a day when he felt it was his duty to speak to Clara. "I have something to say to Haldane; and something to arrange with the chapel managers," he said apologetically to his sisters; and went down all alone, in his black coat and his white tie, with his hat very much on the back of his head, to his daughter's great house.

"I have got some business with Haldane and with the chapel managers," he said, repeating his explanation; "and I thought as I was here, Clara, I might as well come out and see you."

"You are very welcome always, papa."

"But I don't know if I shall be welcome to-day," he went on, "because I want to speak to you, Clara."

"I know," she said, with a faint smile, "about our extravagance and all that. It is of no use. I may as well say this to you at once. I cannot stop it if I would; and I don't know that I would stop it if I could."

"Do you know," he said, coming forward to her, and laying his hand on her shoulder, for though he wore his hat on the back of his head, and took the chair at public meetings, he was a kind man, and loved his only child

"Do you know, Clara, that in the City—you may despise the City, my dear, but it is all-important to your husband—do you know they say Burton is going too fast? I wish I could contradict it, but I can't. They say he's in a bad way. They say——"

"Tell me everything, papa. I am quite able to bear it."

"Well, my dear, I don't want to make you unhappy," said Mr. Baldwin, drawing a long breath, "but people do begin to whisper, in the best-informed circles, that he is very heavily involved."

"Well?" she said, looking up at him. She too drew a long breath, her face, perhaps, paled by the tenth of the tint. But her blue eyes looked up undaunted, without a shadow in them. Her composure, her calm question, drove even Mr. Baldwin, who was used to his daughter's ways, half out of himself.

"Well?" he cried. "Clara, you must be mad. If this is so, what can you think of yourself, who never try to restrain or to remedy?—who never made an attempt to retrench or save a penny? If your husband has even the slightest shadow of embarrassment in his business, is this great, splendid house, full of guests and entertainments, the way to help him through?"

"It is as good a way as any other," she said, still looking at him. "Papa, you speak in ignorance of both him and me. I don't know his circumstances; he does not tell me. It is he that enjoys all this; not me. And if he really should be in danger, I suppose he thinks he had better enjoy it as long as he can; and that is my idea too."

"Enjoy it as long as he can! Spend other people's money in every kind of folly and extravagance!" cried Mr. Baldwin aghast.

"Clara, you must be mad."

"No, indeed," she said quietly. "I am very much in my senses. I know nothing about other people's money. I cannot control Mr. Burton in his business, and he does not tell me. But don't suppose I have not thought this all over. I have taken every circumstance into consideration, papa, and every possibility. If we should ever be ruined, we shall have plenty to bear when that comes. There is Clara to be taken into consideration too. If there were only two days between Mr. Burton and bankruptcy I should give a ball on one of those days. Clara has a right to it. This will be her only moment if what you say is true."

To describe Mr. Baldwin's consternation, his utter amazement, the eyes with which he contemplated his child, would be beyond my

power. He could not, as people say, believe his ears. It seemed to him as if he must be mistaken, and that her words must have some other meaning, which he did not reach.

"Clara," he said, faltering, "you are beyond me. I hope you understand yourself—what—you mean. It is beyond me."

"I understand it perfectly," she said; and then, with a little change of tone, "You understand, papa, that I would not speak so plainly to any one but you. But to you I need not make any secret. If it comes to the worst, Clara and I—Ned has deserted us—will have enough to bear."

"You will always have your settlement, my dear," said her father, quite cowed and overcome, he could not tell why.

"Yes. I shall have my settlement," she said calmly; "but there will be enough to bear."

It was rather a relief to the old man when Clara came in, before whom nothing more could be said. And he was glad to hurry off again, with such astonishment and pain in his heart as an honest couple might have felt who had found a perverse fairy changeling in their child's cradle. He had thought that he knew his daughter. "Clara has a cold exterior," he had said times without number; "but she has a warm heart." Had she a heart at all? he asked himself; had she a conscience? What was she?—a woman or a—— The old man could have stopped on the way and wept. He was an honest old man, and a kind, but what kind of a strange being was this whom he had nourished so long in his heart? It was a relief to him to get among his chapel managers, and regulate their accounts; and then he took Mr. Truston, the minister, by the arm, and walked upon him. "Come with me and see Haldane," he said. Mr. Truston was the same man who had wanted to be faithful to Stephen about the Magazine, but never had ventured upon it yet.

"I am afraid you are ill," said the minister. "Lean upon me. If you will come to my house and take a glass of wine."

"No, no; with my daughter so near I should never be a charge to the brethren," said Mr. Baldwin. "And so poor Haldane gets no better? It is a terrible burden upon the congregation in Ormond Road."

"It must be indeed. I am sure they have been very kind; many congregations——"

"Many congregations would have thrown off the burden utterly; and I confess since they have heard that he has published again, and has been making money by his books——"

"Ah, yes; a literary man has such advantages," said the minister with a sigh.

He did not want to favour the congregation in Ormond Road to the detriment of one of his own cloth; and at the same time it was hard to go against Mr. Baldwin, the lay bishop of the denomination. In this way they came to the Gatehouse. Stephen had his proofs before him, as usual; but the pile of manuscripts was of a different complexion. They were no longer any pleasure to him. The work was still grateful, such as it was, and the power of doing something; but to spend his life recording tea-meetings was hard. He raised his eyes to welcome his old friend with a certain doubt and almost alarm. He too knew that he was a burden upon the congregation in Ormond Road.

"My dear fellow, my dear Stephen!" the old man said, very cordially shaking his hand, "why you are looking quite strong. We shall have him dashing up to Ormond Road again, Mrs. Haldane, and giving out his text, before we know where we are."

Stephen shook his head, with such attempt at smiling as was possible. Mr. Baldwin, however, was not so much afraid of breaking bad news to him as he had been at the great house.

"It is high time you should," he continued, rubbing his hands cheerfully; "for the friends are falling sadly off. We want you there, or somebody like you, Haldane. How we are to meet the expenses next year is more than I can say."

A dead silence followed. Miss Jane, who had been arranging Stephen's books in the corner, stopped short to listen. Mrs. Haldane put on her spectacles to hear the better; and poor Mr. Truston, dragged without knowing it into the midst of such a scene, looked around him as if begging everybody's forbearance, and rubbed his hands faintly too.

"The fact is, my dear Haldane—it was but for five years—and now we've come to the end of the second five—and you have been making money by your books, people say——"

It was some little time before Stephen could answer, his lips had grown so dry. "I think—I know—what you mean," he said.

"Yes. I am afraid that is how it must be. Not with my will—not with my will," said Mr. Baldwin; "but then you see, people say you have been making money by your books."

"He has made sixteen pounds in two years," said Miss Jane.

Stephen held up his hand hurriedly. "I know how it must be," he said. "Every-

body's patience, of course, must give way at last."

"Yes—that is just about how it is."

There was very little more said. Mr. Baldwin picked up his hat, which he had put on the floor, and begged the minister to give him his arm again. He shook hands very affectionately with everybody; he gave them, as it were, his blessing. They all bore it as people ought to bear a great shock, with pale faces, without any profane levity. "They take it very well," he said, as he went out. "They are good people. Oh, my dear Truston, I don't know a greater sign of the difference between the children of this world and the children of the light than the way in which they receive a sudden blow."

He had given two such blows within an hour; he had a right to speak. And in both cases, different as was the mien of the sufferers, the blow itself had all the appearance of a *coup de grâce*. It had not occurred to Mr. Baldwin, when he made that classification, that it was his own child whom he had taken as the type of the children of wrath. He thought of it in the railway, going home; and it troubled him. "Poor Clara! her brain must be affected," he thought; he had never heard of anything so heathenish as her boldly-professed determination to give a ball, if need was, on the eve of her husband's bankruptcy, and for the reason that they would have a right to it. It horrified him a great deal more than if she had risked somebody else's money in trade and lost. Poor Clara! what might be coming upon her! But, anyhow, he reflected, she had her settlement, and that she was a child of many prayers.

Mrs. Burton said nothing of this stroke which had fallen upon her. It made her fears into certainty, and she took certain steps accordingly, but told nobody. In Stephen's room at the Gatehouse there was silence, too, all the weary afternoon. They had lost the half of their living at a blow. The disaster was too great, too sudden and overwhelming to be spoken of; and to one of them, to him who was helpless and could do nothing, it tasted like the very bitterness of death.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MRS. BURTON said nothing about her troubles to any one: she avoided rather than sought confidential intercourse with her husband. She formed her plans and declined to receive any further information on the subject. Her argument to herself

was that no one could have any right to suppose she knew. When the crash came, if come it must, she would be universally considered the first of the victims. The very fact of her entertainments and splendours would be so much evidence that she knew nothing about it—and indeed what did she know? her own fears and suspicions, her father's hints of coming trouble—nothing more. Her husband had never said a warning word to her which betrayed alarm or anxiety. She stood on the verge of the precipice, which she felt a moral certainty was before her, and made her arrangements like a queen in the plenitude of her power. "There will be enough to bear," she repeated to herself. She called all the county about her in these spring months before people had as yet gone to town. She made Dura blaze with lights and echo with music: she filled it full of guests. She made her entertainments on so grand a scale, that everything that had hitherto been known there was thrown into the shade. The excitement, so far as excitement could penetrate into her steady little soul, sustained and kept her up; or at least the occupation did, and the thousand arrangements, big and little, which were necessary. If her husband was ever tempted to seek her sympathy in these strange wild brilliant days which passed like a dream—if the burden on his shoulders ever so bowed the man down that he would have been glad to lean it upon hers, it is impossible to say; he looked at her sometimes wondering what was in her mind; but he was not capable of understanding that clear determined intelligence. He thought she had got fairly into the whirl of mad dissipation and enjoyed it. She was playing into his hands, she was doing the best that could be done to veil his tottering steps, and divert public attention from his business misfortunes. He had no more idea why she was doing it, or with what deliberate conscious steps she was marching forward to meet ruin, than he had of any other incomprehensible wonder in heaven or earth.

The Haldanes made no secret of the distress which had fallen upon them. It was a less loss than the cost of one of Mrs. Burton's parties, but it was unspeakable to them who had no way of replacing it. By one of those strange coincidences, however, which occur so often when good people are driven to desperation, Stephen's publisher quite unexpectedly sent him in April a cheque for fifty pounds, the produce of his last book, a book which he had called "The Window," and which was a kind of moral of

his summer life and thoughts. It was not, he himself thought, a very good book; it was a medley of fine things and poor things, not quite free from that personal twaddle which it is so difficult to keep out of an invalid's or a recluse's view of human affairs. But then the British public is fond of personal twaddle, and liked those bits best which the author was most doubtful about. It was a cheap little work, published by one of those firms which are known as religious publishers; and nothing could be more unexpected, more fortunate, more consoling, than this fifty pounds. Mrs. Haldane, with a piety which, perhaps, was a little contemptuous of poor Stephen's powers, spoke of it, with tears in her eyes, as an answer to prayer; while Miss Jane, who was proud of her brother, tried to apportion the credit, half to Providence and half to Stephen; but anyhow it made up the lost allowance for the current year, and gave the poor souls time to breathe.

All this time the idea which had come into Dr. Maurice's mind on the day of the picnic in October had been slowly germinating. He was not a man whose projects ripened quickly, and this was a project so delicate that it took him a long time to get it fully matured, and to accustom himself to it. It had come to full perfection in his mind when in the end of April Mrs. Drummond received a letter from him, inviting Norah and herself to go to his house for a few days, to see the exhibitions and other shows which belonged to that period of the year. This was an invitation which thrilled Norah's soul within her. She was at a very critical moment of her life. She had lost the honest young lover of her childhood, the boy whose love and service had grown so habitual to her that nobody but Norah knew how dreary the winter had been without him; and she was at present exposed to the full force of attentions much more close, much more subtle and skilful, but perhaps not so honest and faithful. Norah had exchanged the devotion of a young man who loved her as his own soul, for the intoxicating homage of a man who was very much in love with her, but who knew that his prospects would be deeply injured, and his position compromised, did he win the girl whom he wooed with all the fascinations of a hero in a romance, and all the persistency of a mind set upon having its own way. His whole soul was set upon winning her; but what to do afterwards was not so clear, and Rivers, like many another adventurer in love and in war, left the

morrow to provide for itself. But Norah was very reluctant to be won. Sometimes, indeed, capitulation seemed very near at hand, but then her lively little temper would rise up again, or some hidden susceptibility would be touched, or the girl's independent soul would rise in arms against the thought of being subjugated like a young woman in a book by this "novel-hero!" What were his dark eyes, his speaking glances, his skilful inference of a devotion above words, to her? Had not she read about such wiles a thousand times? And was it not an understood rule that the real hero, the true lover, the first of men, was never this bewitching personage, but the plainer, ruder man in the background, with perhaps a big nose, who was not very lovely to look upon? These thoughts contended in Norah with the fascinations of him whom she began to think of as the *contre-héros*. The invitation to London was doubly welcome to her, insomuch that it interrupted this current of thought, and gave her something new to think about. She was fond of Dr. Maurice: she had not been in town since she was a child: she wanted to see the parks and the pictures, and all the stir and tumult of life. For all these six years, though Dura was so near town, the mother and daughter had never been in London. And it looked so bright to Norah, bright with all the associations of her childhood, and full of an interest which no other place could ever have in its associations with the terrible event which ended her childhood. "You will go, mamma?" she said, wistfully reading the letter a second time over her mother's shoulder. And Helen, who felt the need of an interruption and something new to think of as much as her child did, answered "Yes."

Dr. Maurice was more excited about the approaching event than they were, though he had to take no thought about his wardrobe, and they had to take a great deal of thought; the question of Norah's frocks was nothing to his fussiness and agitation about the ladies' rooms and all the arrangements for their comfort. He invited an old aunt who lived near to come and stay with him for the time of the Drummonds' visit, a precaution which seemed to her, as it seems to me, quite unnecessary. I do not think Helen would have had the least hesitation in going to his house at her age, though there had been no chaperon. It was he who wanted the chaperon: he was quite coy and bashful about the business altogether: and the old aunt, who was a sharp old lady, was not only much amused, but had her

suspensions aroused. In the afternoon, before his visitors arrived, he was particularly fidgety. "If you want to go out, Henry, I will receive your guests," the old lady said, not without a chuckle of suppressed amusement, "probably they will only arrive in time to get dressed before dinner. You may leave them to me."

"You are very kind," said the doctor, but he did not go away. He walked from one end of the big drawing-room to the other, and looked at himself in the mirror between the windows, and the mirror over the mantelpiece. And then he took up his position before the fireplace, where of course there was nothing but cut paper. "How absurd are all the relations between men and women," he said, "and how is it that I cannot ask my friend's widow, a woman in middle life, to come to my house—without——"

"Without having me?" said the aunt. "My dear Henry, I have told you before—I think you could. I have no patience with the freedom of the present day, in respect to young people, but, so far as this goes, I think you are too particular—I am sure you could——"

"You must allow me to be the best judge, aunt, of a matter that concerns myself," said Dr. Maurice, with gentle severity. "I know very well what would happen: there would be all sorts of rumours and reports. People might not, perhaps, say there was anything absolutely wrong between us—Pray may I ask what you are laughing at?"

For the old lady had interrupted him by a low laugh, which it was beyond her power to keep in.

"Nothing, my dear, nothing," she said, in a little alarm. "I am sure I beg your pardon, Henry. I had no idea you were so sensitive. How old may this lady be?"

"The question is not about this lady, my dear aunt," he answered in the dogmatic impatient tone which was so unlike him, "but about any lady. It might happen to be a comfort to me to have a housekeeper I could rely on. It would be a great pleasure to be able to contribute to the comfort of Robert Drummond's family, poor fellow. But I dare not. I know the arrangement would no sooner be made than the world would say all sorts of things. How old is Mrs. Drummond? She was under twenty when they were married, I know—and poor Drummond was about my own age. That is, let me see, how long ago? Norah is about eighteen, between eighteen and nineteen.

Her mother must be nearly, if not quite, forty, I should think——"

"Then, my dear Henry——" began the old lady.

"Why, here they are," he said, rushing to the window. But it was only a cab next door, or over the way. He went back to his position with a little flush upon his middle-aged countenance. "My dear aunt," he resumed, with a slight tremor in his voice, "it is not a matter that can be discussed, I assure you. I know what would happen; and I know that poor Helen—I mean Mrs. Drummond—would never submit to anything that would compromise her as Norah's mother. Even if she were not very sensitive on her own account, as women generally are, as Norah's mother of course she requires to be doubly careful. And here am I, the oldest friend they have, as fond of that child as if she were my own, and prevented by an absurd punctilio from taking them into my house, and doing my best to make her happy! As I said before, the relations between men and women are the most ridiculous things in the world."

"But I do think, Henry, you make too much of the difficulties," said the old aunt, busying herself with her work, and not venturing to say more.

"You must allow me to be the best judge," he said, with a mixture of irritation and superiority. "You may know the gossip of the drawing-rooms, which is bad enough, I don't doubt; but I know what *men* say."

"Oh, then, indeed, my poor Henry," said the old lady, with vivacity, eagerly seizing the opportunity to have one shot on her own side, "I can only pray, Good Lord deliver you; for everybody knows there never was a bad piece of scandal yet, but it was a man that set it on foot."

Aunt Mary thus had the last word, and retired with flying colors, and in very high feather from the conflict; for at this moment the Drummonds arrived, and Dr. Maurice rushed down-stairs to meet them. The old aunt was a personage very well worth knowing, though she has very little to do with this history, and it was with mingled curiosity and amusement that she watched for the entrance of Mrs. Drummond and her daughter. It would be a very wise step for him anyhow to marry, she thought. The Maurice family were very well off, and there were not many young offshoots of the race to contend for the doctor's money. Was he contemplating the idea of a wife young enough to be his daughter? or had he really the good sense to

think of a woman about his own age? Aunt Mary, though she was a woman herself, and quite ready to stand up for her own side, considered Helen Drummond, under forty, as about his own age, though he was over fifty. But as the question went through her mind, she shook her head. She knew a great many men who had made fools of themselves by marrying, or wishing to marry, the girl young enough to be their daughter; but the other class, who had the good sense, &c., were very rare indeed.

There was, however, very little light thrown upon the subject by Aunt Mary's observations that evening. Mrs. Drummond was very grave, almost sad; for the associations of the house were all melancholy ones, and her last visit to it came back very closely into her memory as she entered one room—the great old gloomy dining-room—where Norah, a child, had been placed by Dr. Maurice's side at table on that memorable occasion, while she, unable even to make a pretence of eating, sat and looked on. She could not go back now into the state which her mind had been in on that occasion. Everything was calmed and stilled, nay, chilled by this long interval. She could think of her Robert without the sinking of the heart—the sense of hopeless loneliness—which had moved her then. The wound had closed up: the blank, if it had not closed up, had acquired all the calmness of a long-recognized fact. She had made up her mind long since, that the happiness which she could not then consent to part with, was over for her. That is the great secret of what is called resignation: to consent and agree that what you have been in the habit of calling happiness is done with; that you must be content to fill its place with something else, something less. Helen had come to this. She no longer looked for it—no longer thought of it. It was over for her, as her youth was over. Her heart was tried, not by active sorrow, but by a heavy sense of past pain; but that did not hinder her from taking her part in the conversation—from smiling at Norah's sallies, at her enthusiasm, at all the height of her delight in the pleasure Dr. Maurice promised her. Norah was the principal figure in the scene. She was surrounded on every side by that atmosphere of fond partiality in which the flowers of youth are most ready to unfold themselves. Dr. Maurice was even sonder than her mother, and more indulgent; for Helen had the jealous eye which marks imperfections, and that intolerant and sovereign love which cannot put up with a flaw or a speck in those

it cherishes. To Dr. Maurice the specks and flaws were beauties. Norah led the conversation, was gay for every one, talked for every one. And the old aunt laughed within herself, and shook her head: "He cannot keep his eyes off her; he cannot see anything but perfection in her,—but she is a mere excited child, and her mother is a beautiful woman," said Aunt Mary to herself; "man's taste and woman's, it is to be supposed, will be different to the end of time." But after she had made this observation, the old lady was struck by the caressing, fatherly ways of her nephew towards this child. He would smooth her hair when he passed by her; would take her hand into his, unconsciously, and pat it; would lay his hand upon her shoulder; none of which things he would have ventured to do had he meant to present himself to Norah as her lover. He even kissed her cheek, when she said good-night, with uncontrollable fondness, yet unmistakable composure. What did the man mean?

He had sketched out a very pretty programme for them for their three days. Next evening they were to go to the theatre: the next again, to an opera. Norah could not walk, she danced as she went up-stairs. "The only thing is, will my dress do?" she said, as she hung about her mother in the pretty fresh room, new prepared, and hung with bright chintz, in which Mrs. Drummond was lodged. Could it have been done on purpose? For certainly the other rooms in the house still retained their dark old furniture; dark-coloured, highly-polished mahogany, with deep red and green damask curtains—centuries old, as Norah thought. Mrs. Drummond was surprised, too, at the aspect of this room. She was more than surprised, she was almost offended, by the presence of the old aunt as chaperon. "Does the man think I am such a fool as to be afraid of him?" she wondered, with a frown and a smile, but gave herself up to Norah's pleasure, rejoicing to see that the theatre and the opera were strong enough to defeat for the moment and drive from the field both Cyril and Ned. And the next day, and the next, passed like days of paradise to Norah. She drove about in Dr. Maurice's carriage, and laughed at her own grandeur, and enjoyed it. She called perpetually to her mother to notice ladies walking who were like themselves. "That is what you and I should be doing, if it were not for this old darling of a doctor! trudging along in the sun, getting hot and red——"

"But think, you little sybarite, that is what

we shall be doing to-morrow," cried Helen, half amused and half afraid.

"No, the day after to-morrow," said Norah, "and then it will be delightful. We can look at the people in the carriages, and say, 'We are as good as you;—we looked down upon you yesterday.' And mamma, we are going to the opera to-night!"

"You silly child," Helen said. But to eyes that danced so, and cheeks that glowed so, what could any mother say?

It was the after-piece after that opera, however, which was what neither mother nor daughter had calculated upon, but which, no doubt, was the special cause of their invitation, and of the new chintz in the bedrooms, and of all the expense Dr. Maurice had been at. Norah was tired when they got home. She had almost over-enjoyed herself. She chattered so that no one could say a word. Her cheeks were blazing with excitement. When the two elder people could get a hearing, they sent her off to bed, though she protested she had not said half she had to say. "Save it up for to-morrow," said Dr. Maurice, "and run off and put yourself to bed, or I shall have you ill on my hands. Mrs. Drummond, send her away."

"Go, Norah, dear, you are tired," said Helen.

Norah stood protesting, with her pretty white cloak hanging about her; her rose-ribbons a little in disorder; her eyes like two sunbeams. How fondly her old friend looked at her; with what proud, tender, adoring, fatherly admiration! If Aunt Mary had not been away in bed, then at least she must have divined. Dr. Maurice lit her candle and took her to the door. He stooped down suddenly to her ear and whispered, "I have something to say to your mother." Norah could not have explained the sensation that came over her. She grew chill to her very fingers' ends, and gave a wondering glance at him, then accepted the candle without a word, and went away. The wonder was still in her eyes when she got up-stairs, and looked at herself in the glass. Instead of throwing off her cloak to see how she looked, as is a girl's first impulse, she stared blankly into the glass, and could see nothing but that surprise. What could he be going to talk about? What would her mother say?

Helen had risen to follow her daughter, but Dr. Maurice came back, having closed the door carefully, and placed a chair for her. "Mrs. Drummond, can you give me ten minutes? I have something to say to you," he said.

"Surely," said Helen; and she took her seat, somewhat surprised; but not half so much surprised as Norah was, nor, indeed, so much as Dr. Maurice was, now that matters had finally come to a crisis, to find himself in such an extraordinary position. Helen ran lightly over in her mind a number of subjects on which he might be going to speak to her; but the real subject never entered her thoughts. He did not sit down, though he had given her a chair. He moved about uneasily in front of her, changing his attitude a dozen times in a minute, and clearing his throat. "He is going to offer me money for Norah," was Helen's thought.

"Mrs. Drummond," he said—and his beginning confirmed her in her idea—"I am not a—marrying man, as you know. I am—past the age—when men think of such things. I am on the shady side of fifty, though not very far gone; and you are—about forty, I suppose?"

"Thirty-nine," said Helen, with more and more surprise, and yet with the natural reluctance of a woman to have a year unjustly added to her age.

"Well, well, it is very much the same thing. I never was in love that I know of, at least not since;—and—and—that sort of thing, of course, is over for—you."

"Dr. Maurice, what do you mean?" cried Helen in dismay.

"Well, it is not very hard to guess," he said doggedly. "I mean that you are past the love-business, you know, and I—never came to it, so to speak. Look here, Helen Drummond, why shouldn't you and I, if it comes to that—marry? If I durst do it I'd ask you to come and live here, and let Norah be child to both of us, without any nonsense between you and me. But that can't be done, as you will easily perceive. Now, I am sure we could put up with one another as well as most people, and we have one strong bond between us in Norah—and—I could give her everything she wishes for. I could and I would provide for her when I die. You are not one to want pretences made to you, or think much of a sacrifice for your child's sake. I am not so vain but to allow that it might be a sacrifice—to us both."

"Dr. Maurice," said Helen, half laughing, half sobbing, "if this is a joke——"

"Joke! am I in the way of making such jokes? Why, it has cost me six months to think this joke out. There is no relaxation of the necessary bonds that I would not be ready to allow. You know the house and

my position, and everything I could offer. As for settlements, and all business of that kind——"

"Hush," she said. "Stop!" She rose up and held out her hand to him. There were tears in her eyes; but there was also a smile on her face, and a blush which went and came as she spoke. "Dr. Maurice," she said, "don't think that I cannot appreciate the pure and true friendship for Robert and me——"

"Just so, just so!" he interposed, nodding his head; he put his other hand on hers, and patted it as he had patted Norah's, but he did not again look her in the face. The elderly bachelor had grown shy—he did not know why; the most curious sensation, a feeling quite unknown to him was creeping about the region of his heart.

"And the love for Norah——" resumed Helen.

"Just so, just so."

"Which have made you think of this. But—but—but——" She stopped; she had been running to the side of tears, when suddenly she changed her mind. "But I think it is all a mistake! I am quite ready to come and stay with you, to keep house for you, to let you have Norah's company, when you like to ask us. I don't want any chaperon. Your poor, dear, good aunt! Dr. Maurice," cried Helen, her voice rising into a hysterical laugh, "I assure you it is all a mistake."

He let her hand drop out of his. He turned away from her with a shrug of his shoulders. He walked to the table and screwed up the moderator lamp, which had run down. Then he came back to his former position and said, "I am much more in the world than you are; you will permit me to consider myself the best judge in this case. It is not a mistake. And I have no answer from you to my proposal as yet."

Then Helen's strength gave way. The more serious view which she had thrust from her, which she had rejected as too solemn, came back. The blush vanished from her face, and so did the smile. "You were his friend," she said with quivering lips. "You loved him as much as any one could, except me. Have you forgotten you are speaking to—Robert's wife?"

"Good Lord!" cried Dr. Maurice, with sudden terror; "but he is dead."

"Yes, he is dead; but I do not see what difference that makes; when a woman has once been a man's wife, she is so always. If there is any other world at all, she must be so

always. I hate the very name of widow!" cried Helen, vehemently, with the tears glittering in her eyes. "I abhor it; I don't believe in it. I am his wife!"

Dr. Maurice was a man who had always held himself to be invincible to romantic or high-flown feelings. But somehow he was startled by this view of the question. It had not occurred to him before; for the moment it staggered him, so that he had to pause and think it over. Then he said, "Nonsense!" abruptly. "Mrs. Drummond, I cannot think that such a view as this is worth a moment's consideration; it is against both reason and common sense."

She did not make any reply; she made a movement of her hand, deprecating, expostulating, but she would not say any more.

"And Scripture, too," said Dr. Maurice, triumphantly; "it is quite against Scripture." Then he remembered that this was not simply an argument in which he was getting the better, but a most practical question. "If it is disagreeable to you, it is a different matter," he said; "but I had hoped, with all the allowances I was ready to make, and for Norah's sake——"

"It is not disagreeable, Dr. Maurice; it is simply impossible, and must always be so," she said.

Then there was another silence, and the two stood opposite to each other, not looking at each other, longing both for something to free them. "In that case I suppose there had better be no more words on the subject," he said, turning half away.

"Except thanks," she cried; "thanks for the most generous thoughts, the truest friendship. I will never forget——"

"I do not know how far it was generous," he said moodily, and he got another candle and lighted it for her, as he had done for Norah; "and the sooner you forget the better. Good night."

Good night! When he looked round the vacant room a moment after, and felt himself alone, it seemed to Dr. Maurice as if he had been dreaming. He must have fallen down suddenly from some height or other—fallen heavily and bruised himself, he thought—and so woke up out of an odd delusion quite unlike him, which had arisen he could not tell how. It was a very curious sensation. He felt sore and downcast, sadly disappointed and humbled in his own conceit. It had not even occurred to him that the matter might end in this way. He gave a long sigh, and said aloud, "Perhaps it is quite as well it has ended so. Probably we should not have liked

it had we tried it," and then went up to his lonely chamber, hearing, as he thought, his step echo over all the vacant house. Yes, it was a vacant house. He had chosen that it should be years ago, and yet the feeling now was dreary to him, and it would never be anything but vacant for all the rest of his life.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It was difficult for the two who had thus parted at night to meet again at the breakfast-table next morning without any sign of that encounter, before the sharp eyes of Aunt Mary, and Norah's youthful, vivacious powers of observation. Dr. Maurice was the one who found the ordeal most hard. He was sullen, and had a headache, and talked very little, not feeling able for it. "You are bilious, Henry; that is what it is," the aunt said. But though he was over fifty, and prided himself on his now utterly prosaic character, the doctor felt wounded by such an explanation. He did not venture to glance at Helen, even when he shook hands with her; though he had a lurking curiosity within him to see how she looked, whether triumphant or sympathetic. He knew that he ought to have been gay and full of talk, to put the best face possible upon his downfall; but he did not feel able to do it; not to feel sore, not to feel small, and miserable, and disappointed, was beyond his powers. Helen was not gay either, nor at all triumphant; she felt the embarrassment of the position as much as he did; but in these cases it is the woman who generally has her wits most about her; and Mrs. Drummond, who was conscious also of her child's jealous inspection, talked rather more than usual. Norah had demanded to know what the doctor had to say on the previous night; a certain dread was in her mind. She had felt that something was coming, something that threatened the peace of the world. "What did he say to you, mamma?" she had asked anxiously. "Nothing of importance," Helen had replied. But Norah knew better; and all that bright May morning, while the sunshine shone out of doors, even though it was in London, and tempted the country girl abroad, she kept by her mother's side, and watched her with suspicious eyes. Had Norah known the real state of affairs, her shame and indignation would have known no bounds; but Helen made so great an effort to dismiss all consciousness from her face and tone, that the child was balked at last, and retired from the field. Aunt Mary, who had experience to back her, saw more clearly. Whatever had been going to happen had hap-

pened, she perceived, and had not been successful. Thus they all breakfasted, watching each other. Helen being the only one who knew everything and betrayed nothing. After breakfast they were going to the Exhibition. It had been deferred to this day, which was to be their last.

"I do not think I will go," said Dr. Maurice; and then he caught Norah's look full of disappointment, which was sweet to him. "You want me, do you, child?" he asked. There was a certain ludicrous pathos in the emphasis which was almost too much for Helen's gravity, though, indeed, laughter was little in her thoughts.

"Of course I want you," said Norah; "and so does mamma. Fancy sending us away to wander about London by ourselves! That was not what you invited us for, surely, Dr. Maurice? And then after the pictures, let us have another splendid drive in the carriage, and despise all the people who are walking! It will be the last time. You rich people, you have not half the pleasure you might have in being rich. I suppose, now, when you see out of the carriage window somebody you know walking, it does not make you proud?"

"I don't think it does," said the doctor with a smile.

"That is because you are hardened to it," said Norah. "You can have it whenever you please; but as for me, I am as proud——"

"I wish you had it always, my dear," said Dr. Maurice; and this time his tone was almost lachrymose. It was so hard-hearted of Helen to deny her child these pleasures and advantages, all to be purchased at the rate of a small personal sacrifice on her part—a sacrifice such as he himself was quite ready to make.

"Oh, I should not mind that," cried Norah; "if I had it always I should get hardened to it too. I should not mind; most likely then I should prefer walking, and think carriages only fit for old ladies. Didn't you say that one meets everybody at the Academy, mamma?"

"A great many people, Norah."

"I wonder whom we shall meet," said the girl; and a sudden blush floated over her face. Helen looked at her with some anxiety. She did not know what impression Cyril Rivers might have made on Norah's heart. Was it him she was thinking of? Mrs. Drummond herself wondered, too, a little. She was half afraid of the old friends she might see there. But then she reflected

to herself dreamily, that life goes very quickly in London, that six years was a long time, and that her old friends might have forgotten her. How changed her own feelings were! She had never been fond of painters, her husband's brothers-in-arms. Now the least notable of them, the most painty, the most slovenly, would look somehow like a shadow of Robert. Should she see any of those old faces? Whom should she meet? Norah's light question moved many echoes of which the child knew nothing; and it was to be answered in a way of which neither of them dreamed.

The mere entrance into those well-known rooms had an indescribable effect upon Helen. How it all rushed back upon her, the old life! The pilgrimages up those steps, the progress through the crowd to that special spot where one picture was hung; the anxiety to see how it looked—if there was anything near that "killed" it in colour, or threw it into the shade in power; her own private hope, never expressed to any one, that it might "come better" in the new place. Dr. Maurice stalked along by her side, but he did not say anything to her; and for her part, she could not speak—her heart and her eyes were full. She could only see the other people's pictures glimmering as through a mist. It seemed so strange to her, almost humiliating, that there was nothing of her own to go to—nothing to make a centre to this gallery, which had relapsed into pure art, without any personal interest in it. By-and-by, when the first shock had worn off, she began to be able to see what was on the walls, and to come back to her present circumstances. So many names were new to her in those six years; so many that she once knew had crept out of sight into corners and behind doorways. She had begun to get absorbed in the sight, which was so much more to her than to most people, when Mr. Rivers came up to them. He had known they were to be in town; he had seen them at the opera the previous night, and had found out a good deal about their plans. But London was different from Dura; and he had not ventured to offer his attentions before the eyes of all the world, and all the cousins and connections and friends who might have come to a knowledge of the fact that an unknown pretty face had attracted his homage. But of a morning, at the Royal Academy, he felt himself pretty safe; there every one is liable to meet some friend from the country, and the most watchful eyes of society are not on the alert at

early hours. He came to them now with eager salutations.

"I tried hard to get at you at the opera last night," he said, putting himself by Norah's side; "but I was with my own people, and I could not get away."

"Were you at the opera last night?" said Norah, with not half the surprise he anticipated; for she was not aware of the facilities of locomotion in such places, nor that he might have gone to her had he so desired; and besides, she had seen no one, being intent upon the stage. Yet there was a furtive look about him now, a glance round now and then, to see who was near them, which startled her. She could not make out what it meant.

"Come, and I will show you the best pictures," he said; and he took her catalogue from her hand and pointed out to her which must be looked at first.

They made a pretty group as they stood thus,—Norah looking up with her sunshiny eyes, and he stooping over her, bending down till his silky black beard almost touched her hair. She little, and he tall—she full of vivacity, light, and sunshine; he somewhat quiet, languishing, Byronic in his beauty. Norah was not such a perfect contrast to him as Clara was—the Rubens to the Byron; but her naturalness, the bright, glowing intelligence and spirit about her—the daylight sweetness of her face, with which soul had as much to do as feature, contrasted still more distinctly with the semi-artificiality of the hero. For even granting that he was a little artificial, he was a real hero all the same; his handsomeness and air of good society were unmistakable, his conversation was passable; he knew the thousand things which people in society know, and which, whether they understand them or not, they are in the habit of hearing talked about. All these remarks were made, not by Norah, nor by Norah's mother, but by Dr. Maurice, who stood by and did not pretend to have any interest in the pictures. And this young fellow was the Honourable Cyril, and would be Lord Rivers. Dr. Maurice kept an eye upon him, wondering, as Helen had done, Did he mean anything? what did he mean?

"But there is one above all which I must show you—every one is talking of it," said Mr. Rivers. "Come this way, Miss Drummond. It is not easy to reach it; there is always such a crowd round it. Dr. Maurice, bring Mrs. Drummond; it is in the next room. Come this way."

Norah followed him, thinking of nothing

but the pictures; and her mother and Dr. Maurice went after them slowly, saying nothing to each other. They had entered the great room, following the younger pair, when some one stepped out of the crowd and came forward to Helen. He took off his hat and called her by her name—at first doubtfully, then with assurance.

"I thought I could not be mistaken," he cried, "and yet it is so long since you have been seen here."

"I am living in the country," said Helen. Once more the room swam round her. The new-comer's voice and aspect carried her back, with all the freshness of the first impression, to the studio and its visitors again.

"And you had just been in my mind," said the painter. "There is a picture here which reminds us all so strongly of poor dear Drummond. Will you let me take you to it? It is exactly in his style, his best style, with all that tenderness of feeling—it has set us all talking of you and him. Indeed, none of his old friends have forgotten him; and this is so strangely like his work——"

"Where is it?—one of his pupils, perhaps," said Helen. She tried to be very composed, and to show no emotion; but it was so long since she had heard his name, so long since he had been spoken of before her! She felt grateful, as if they had done her a personal service, to think that they talked of Robert still.

"This way," said the painter; and just then Norah met her, flying back with her eyes shining, her ribbons flying, wonder and excitement in her face.

Norah seized her mother by the hands, gasping in her haste and emotion. "Oh, mamma, come; it is our picture," she cried.

Wondering, Helen went forward. It was the upper end of the room, the place of honour. Whether it was that so many people around her carried her on like a body-guard making her a way through the crowd, or that the crowd itself, moved by that subtle sympathy which sometimes communicates itself to the mass more easily than to individuals, melted before her, as if feeling she had the best right to be there, I cannot tell. But all at once Helen found herself close to the crimson cord which the pressure of the throng had almost broken down, standing before a picture. One picture—was there any other in the place? It was the picture of a face looking up, with two upward reaching hands, from the bottom of an abyss, full of whirling clouds and vapour. High above this was a bank of heavenly blue, and a white cloud of faintly

indistinct spectators, pitiful angel forms, and one visionary figure as of a woman gazing down. But it was the form below in which the interest lay. It was worn and pale, with the redness of tears about the eyes, the lips pressed closely together, the hands only appealing, held up in a passionate silence. Helen stood still, with eyes that would not believe what they saw. She became unconscious of everything about her, thought the people thronged upon her, supporting her, though she did not know. Then she held out her hands wildly, with a cry which rang through the rooms and penetrated every one in them—"Robert!"—and fell at the foot of the picture, which was called "Dives"—the first work of a nameless painter whom nobody knew.

It would be impossible to describe the tumult and commotion which rose in the room to which everybody hastened from every corner of the exhibition, thronging the doorways and every available corner, and making it impossible for some minutes to remove her. "A lady fainted! Is that all?" the disappointed spectators cried. They had expected something more exciting than so common, so trifling an occurrence. "Fortunately," the newspapers said who related the incident, "a medical man was present;" and when Helen came to herself, she found Dr. Maurice standing over her, with his finger on her pulse. "It is the heat, and the fatigue—and all that," he said; and all through the rooms people repeated to each other that it was the heat and the dust and the crowd, and that there was nothing so fatiguing as looking at pictures. "Both body and mind are kept on the strain, you know," they said, and immediately thought of luncheon. But Dr. Maurice thought of something very different. He did not understand all this commotion about a picture; if his good heart would have let him, he would have tried to think that Helen was "making a fuss." As it was he laid this misfortune to the door of women generally, whom there was no understanding; and then, in a parenthesis, allowed that he might himself be to blame. He should not have agitated her, he thought; but added, "Good Lord, what are women good for, if they have to be kept in a glass house, and never spoken to? The best thing is to be rid of them, after all."

I will not attempt to describe what Helen's thoughts were when she came to herself. She would not, dared not betray to any one the impression, which was more than an impression—the conviction that had sud-

denly come to her. She put up her hand, and silenced Norah, who was beginning, open-mouthed, "Oh, mamma!" She called the old friend to her, who had attended the group down into the vestibule, and begged him to find out for her exactly who the painter was, and where he was to be heard of; and there she sat, still abstracted, with a singing in her ears, which she thought was only the rustle of the thoughts that hurried through her brain, until she should be able to go home. It was while they were waiting thus, standing round her, that another event occurred, of which Helen was too much absorbed to take any but the slightest cognizance. She was seated on a bench, still very pale, and unable to move. Dr. Maurice was mounting guard over her. Norah stood talking to Mr. Rivers on the other side; while meanwhile the stream of the public was flowing past, and new arrivals entering every moment by the swinging doors. Norah had grown very earnest in her talk. "We have the very same subject at home, the same picture," she was saying; her eyelashes were dewy with tears, her whole face full of emotion. Her colour went and came as she spoke; she stood looking up to him with a thrill of feeling and meaning about her, such as touch the heart more than beauty. And yet there was no lack of beauty. A lady who had just come in, paused, having her attention attracted to the group, and looked at them all, as she thought she had a right to do. "The poor lady who fainted," she heard some one say. But this girl who stood in front had no appearance of fainting. She was all life and tenderness and fire. The woman who looked on admired her fresh, sweet youthfulness, her face, which in its changing colour was like a flower. She admired all these, and made out, with a quick, observant eye, that the girl was the daughter of the pale, beautiful woman by the wall, and not unworthy of her. And then suddenly, without a pause, she called out, "Cyril!" Young Rivers started as if a shot had struck him. He rushed to her with tremulous haste. "Mother! you don't mean to say that you have come here alone?"

"But I do mean it, and I want you to take care of me," she said taking his arm at once. "I meant to come early. We have no time to lose."

Norah stood surprised, looking at the woman who was Cyril's mother; in a pretty pause of expectation, the blush coming and going on her face, her hand ready to be timidly put out in greeting, her pretty mouth

half smiling already, her eyes watching with an interest of which she was not ashamed. Why should she be ashamed of being interested in Cyril's mother? She waited for the approach, the introduction—most likely the elder woman's gracious greeting. "For she must have heard of me too," Norah thought. She cast down her eyes, pleasantly abashed; for Lady Rivers was certainly looking at her. When she looked up again, in wonder that she was not spoken to, Cyril was on the stair with his mother, going up. He was looking back anxiously, waving his hand to her from behind Lady Rivers. He had a beseeching look in his eyes, his face looked miserable across his mother's shoulders, but—he was gone. Norah looked round her stupefied. Had anything happened?—was she dreaming? And then the blood rushed to her face in a crimson flush of pride and shame.

She bore this blow alone, without even her mother to share and soften it; and the child staggered under it for the moment. She grew as pale as Helen herself after that one flash. When the carriage came to the door, two women, marble-white, stepped into it. Dr. Maurice had not the heart to go with them; he would walk home, he said. And Norah looked out of the window, as she had so joyfully anticipated doing in her happiness and levity, but not to despise the people who walked. The only thought of which she was capable was—Is everybody like that? Do people behave so naturally? Is it the way of the world?

This is what they met at the Academy, where they went so lightly, not knowing. The name of the painter of the "Dives" reached them that same night; it was not in the catalogue. His name was John Sinclair, Fifth Avenue, New York.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"You must be dreaming," cried Dr. Maurice with energy. "You must be dreaming! With my—folly—and other things—you have got into a nervous state."

"I am not dreaming," she said very quietly. There was no appearance of excitement about her. She sat with her hands clasped tightly together, and her eyes wandering into the unknown, into the vacant air before her. And her mind had got possession of one burden, and went over and over it, repeating within herself, "John Sinclair, Fifth Avenue, New York."

"I will show you the same picture," she

went on. "The very same, line for line. It was the last he ever did. And in his letter he spoke of Dives looking up—John Sinclair, Fifth Avenue, New York!"

"Helen, Helen!" said Dr. Maurice with a look of pity. He had never called her anything but Mrs. Drummond till the evening before, and now the other seemed so natural; for, in fact, she did not even notice what he called her. "How easy is it to account for all this! Some one else must have seen the sketch, who was impressed by it as much as you were, and who knew the artist was dead, and could never claim his property. How easy to see how it may have been done, especially by a smart Yankee abroad."

She shook her head without a word, with a faint smile; argument made no difference to her. She was sure; and what did it matter what any one said?

"Then I will tell you what I will do," he said. "I have some friends in New York. I will have inquiries made instantly about John Sinclair. Indeed it is quite possible some one may know him here. I shall set every kind of inquiry on foot to-morrow, to satisfy you. I warn you nothing will come of it—nothing would make me believe such a thing; but still, to prevent you taking any rash steps—"

"I will take no rash steps," she said. "I will do nothing. I will wait till—I hear."

"Why this is madness," he said. And then all at once a cold shudder passed over him, and he, said to himself, "Good God! what if she had not refused last night!"

But the very fact that she had refused was a kind of guarantee that there was nothing in this wild idea of hers. Had there been anything in it, of course she would have accepted, and all sorts of horrors would have ensued. Such was Dr. Maurice's opinion of Providence, and the opinion of many other judicious people. The fact that a sudden reappearance would do no harm made it so much less likely that there would be any reappearance. He tried hard to dismiss the idea altogether from his mind. It was not a comfortable idea. It is against all the traditions, all the prejudices of life, that a man should come back from the dead. A wild, despairing Dives might wish for it, or a mourner half frantic with excess of sorrow; but to the ordinary looker-on the idea is so strange as to be painful. Dr. Maurice had a true affection for Robert Drummond; but he could not help feeling that it would be out of all character, out of harmony, almost an

offence upon decency that he should not be dead.

It was curious, however, what an effect this fancy of Helen's had in clearing away the cloud of embarrassment which had naturally fallen between her and him. All that produced that cloud had evidently disappeared from her mind. She remembered it no more. It was not that she had thrust it away of set will and purpose, but that without any effort it had disappeared. This was, it is true, somewhat humiliating to Dr. Maurice; but it was very convenient for all the purposes of life that it should be so. And she sat with him now and discussed the matter, abstracted in the great excitement which had taken possession of her, yet calmed by it, without a recollection that anything had ever passed between them which could confuse their intercourse. This unconsciousness, I say, was humiliating in one sense, though in another it was a relief to the man who did not forget; but it confused him while it set Helen at her ease. It was so extraordinary to realise what was the state of affairs yesterday, and what to-day—to enter into so new and wonderful a region of possibilities, after having lived so long in quite another; for, to be sure, Helen had only known of Dr. Maurice's project as regarded herself since last night; whereas, he had known it for six months, and during all that time had been accustoming himself to it, and now had to make a mental spring as far away from it as possible—a kind of gymnastic exercise which has a very bewildering effect upon an ordinary mind.

It was a relief to all the party when the Drummonds went home next morning; except, perhaps, to the old aunt, who had grown interested in the human drama thus unexpectedly produced before her, and who would have liked to see it out. The mother and daughter were glad to go home; and yet how life had changed to them in these three days! It had given to Helen the glow of a wild, incomprehensible hope, a something supernatural, mixed with terror and wonder, and a hundred conflicting emotions; while to Norah it had taken the romance out of life. To contemplate life without romance is hard upon a girl; to have a peep, as it were, behind the scenes, and see the gold of fairyland corroding itself into slates, and the beauty into dust and ashes. Such a revolution chills one to the very soul. It is almost worse than the positive heartbreak of disappointed love, for that has a warm admixture of excitement, and is supported by the very

sharpness of its own suffering; whereas in Norah's pain there was but disenchantment and angry humiliation, and that horrible sense that the new light was true and the other false, which takes all courage from the heart. She had told her mother, and Helen had been very indignant, but not so wroth as her daughter. "Lady Rivers might have no time to wait—she might have wanted him for something urgent—there might be something to explain," Helen said; but as for Norah, she felt that no explanation was possible. For months past this man had been making a show of his devotion to her. He had done everything except ask her in words to be his wife. He had been as her shadow, whenever he could come to Dura, and his visits had been so frequent that it was very evident he had seized every opportunity to come: yet the moment his mother appeared on the scene, the woman whom in all the world he ought to have most wished to attach to the girl whom he loved, he had left her with shame and embarrassment—escaped from her without even the politeness of a leave-taking. Norah had wondered whether she cared for him in the old days; she had asked herself shyly, as girls do, whether the little flutter of her heart at his appearance could possibly mean that sacredest, most wonderful and fascinating of mysteries—love? Sometimes she had been disposed to believe it did: and then again she had surprised herself in the midst of a sudden longing for poor Ned with his big nose, and had blushed and asked herself angrily, was the one compatible with the other? In short, she had not known what to make of her own feelings; for she was not experienced enough to be able to tell the difference—a difference which sometimes puzzles the wisest—between the effect produced by gratified vanity, and pleasure in the love of another, and that which springs from love itself. But she was in no doubt about the anger, the mortification, the indignant shame with which her whole nature rose up against the man who had dared to be ashamed of her. Of this there could be no explanation. She said to herself that she hoped he would not come again or attempt to make any explanation, and then she resented bitterly the fact that he did not come. She had made up her mind what she would say, how she would crush him with quiet scorn, and wonder at his apologies. "Why should you apologize, Mr. Rivers? I had no wish to be introduced to your mother," she meant to say; but as day after day passed, and he gave her no opportunity

of saying this, Norah's thoughts grew more bitter, more fiery than ever. And life was dull without this excitement in it. The weather was bright, and the season sweet, and I suppose she had her share of rational pleasure as in other seasons; but to her own consciousness Norah was bitterly ill-used, inasmuch as she had not an opportunity to tell, or at least to show Cyril Rivers what she thought of him. It had been an immediate comfort to her after the affront he had put upon her, that she would have this in her power.

The change that had come upon the lives of the two ladies in the Gatehouse was, however, scarcely apparent to their little world. Norah was a little out of temper, fitful, and ready to take offence, the Daltons at the Rectory thought; and Mrs. Drummond was more silent than usual, and had an absorbed look in her eyes, a look of abstraction for which it was difficult to account. But this was all that was apparent outside. Perhaps Mr. Rivers was a little longer than usual in visiting Dura; he had not been there for ten days, and Katie Dalton wondered audibly what had become of him. But nobody except Norah supposed for a moment that his connection with Dura was to be broken off in this sudden way. And everything else went on as usual. If Mrs. Drummond was less frequently visible, no one remarked it much. Norah would run over and ask Katie to walk with her, on the plea that "mamma has a headache," and Mrs. Dalton would gather her work together, and cross the road in the sunshine and "sit with" the sufferer. But the only consequence of this visit would be that the blinds would be drawn down over the three windows in front, Mrs. Dalton having an idea that light was bad for a headache, and that when she returned she would tell her eldest daughter that poor dear Mrs. Drummond was very poorly and very anxious for news of a friend whom she had not heard of for years.

And the picture of Dives, which had been hung in a sacred corner, where Helen said her prayers, was brought out, and placed in the full light of day. It was even for a time brought down-stairs while the first glow of novel hope and wonder lasted, and placed in the drawing-room, where everybody who saw it wondered at it. It was not so well painted as the great picture in the Academy. It was even different in many of its details. There was no hope in the face of this, but only a haggard passionate despair, while the look of the other was concentrated into such an

agony of appealing as cannot exist where there is no hope. Dr. Maurice even, when he came down, declared forcibly that it was difficult for him to trace the resemblance. Perhaps the leading idea was the same, but then it was so differently worked out. He looked at the picture in every possible light, and this was the conclusion he came to:—No; no particular resemblance,—a coincidence, that was all. And John Sinclair was a perfectly well-known painter, residing in New York, a man known to Dr. Maurice's friends there. Why there was no name to the picture in the catalogue nobody could tell. It was some absurd mistake or other; but John Sinclair, the painter, was a man who had been known in New York for years. "Depend upon it, it is only a coincidence," Dr. Maurice said. After that visit, from what feeling I cannot say, the picture was taken back up-stairs. Not that Mrs. Drummond was convinced, but that she shrank from further discussion of a matter on which she felt so deeply. She would sit before it for hours, gazing at it, careless of everything else; and if I were to reproduce all the thoughts that coursed through Helen's mind, I should do her injury with the reader, who, no doubt, believes that the feelings in a wife's mind, when such a hope entered it, could only be those of a half-delirious joy. But Helen's thoughts were not wildly joyful. She had been hardly and painfully trained to do without him, to put him out of her life. Her soul had slid into new ways, changed meanings; and in that time what change of meaning, what difference of nature might have come to a man who had returned from death and the grave? Could it all be undone? Could it float away like a tale that is told, that tale of seven long years? Would the old assimilate with the new, and the widow become a wife again without some wrench, some convulsion of nature? Not long before she had denounced the name vehemently, crying out against it, declaring that she did not believe in it: but now, when perhaps it might turn out that her widowhood had been indeed a fiction and unreal—now! How she was to be a wife again; how her existence was to suffer a new change, and return into its old channel, Helen could not tell. And yet that Robert should live again, that he should receive some recompense for all his sufferings; that even she who had been in her way so cruel to him, should be able to make up for it—for that Helen would have given her life. The news about John Sinclair was a discouragement, but still it did not touch her faith. She carried

her picture up-stairs again, and put it reverently, not in its old corner, but where the sunshine would fall upon it and the full light of day. The fancifulness of this proceeding did not occur to her, for grief and hope, and all the deeper emotions of the heart, are always fanciful: and in this time of suspense, when she could do nothing, when she was waiting, listening for indications of what was coming, that silent idol-worship which no one knew of, did her good.

Meanwhile Dura went on blazing with lights, and sweet with music, making every day a holiday. Mrs. Burton did not walk so much as she used to do, but drove about, giving her orders, paying her visits, with beautiful horses which half the county envied, and toilets which would have been remarked even in the park. "That little woman is losing her head," the Rector said, as he looked at an invitation his wife had just received for a fête which was to eclipse all the others, and which was given in celebration of Clara's birthday. It was fixed for the 6th of July, and people were coming to it from far and near. There was to be a garden party first, a sumptuous so-called breakfast, and a ball at night. The whole neighbourhood was agitated by the preparations for this solemnity. It was said that Ned, poor Ned, whose disappearance was now an old story, was to be disinherited, and that Clara was to be the heiress of all. The importance thus given to her birthday gave a certain colour to the suggestion; it was like a coming of age, people said, and replaced the festivities which ought to have taken place on the day when Ned completed his twenty-first year, a day which had passed very quietly a few weeks before, noted by none. But to Clara's birthday feast everybody was invited. The great county people, the Merewethers themselves, were coming, and in consideration of Clara's possible heiress-ship, it was whispered that the Marchioness had thoughts of making her son a candidate for the place deserted by Cyril Rivers. Cyril, too, moreover was among the guests: he was one of a large party which was coming from town, and the village people were asked, the Daltons and the Drummonds, beside all the lesser gentry of the neighbourhood. It was to Katie Dalton's importunate beseechings, seconded, no doubt, by her own heart, which had begun to tire of seclusion and long for a little pleasure, that Norah relinquished her first proud determination not to go; and Dr. Maurice had just sent a box from town containing two dresses, one for the

evening, and one for out-of-doors, which it was beyond the powers of any girl of nineteen to refuse the opportunity of wearing. When Norah had made up her own mind to this effort, she addressed herself to the task of overcoming her mother's reluctance; and, after much labour, succeeded so far that a compromise was effected. Norah went to the out-door fête, under the charge of Mrs. Dalton, and Helen with a sigh took out her black silk gown once more, and prepared to go with her child in the evening. The Daltons were always there, good neighbours to support and help her; and seated by Mrs. Dalton's side, who knew something of her anxiety about that friend whom she had not heard of for years, Mrs. Drummond felt herself sustained. When Norah returned with the Daltons from the garden party, Mr. Rivers accompanied the girls. He came with them to the door of the Gatehouse, where Katie, secretly held fast by Norah, accompanied her friend. He lingered on the white steps, waiting to be asked in; but Norah gave no such invitation. She went back to her mother triumphant, full of angry delight.

"I have been perfectly civil to him, mamma! I have taken the greatest care—I have not avoided him, nor been stiff to him, nor anything. And he has tried so hard, so very hard, to have an explanation. Very likely! as if I would listen to any explanation."

"How did you avoid it, Norah, if you were neither angry nor stiff?"

"Katie, mamma, always Katie! I put her between him and me wherever we went. It was fun," cried Norah, with eyes that sparkled with revengeful satisfaction. Her spirits had risen to the highest point. She had regained her position; she had got the upper hand, which Norah loved. The prospect of the evening which was still before her, in which she should wear that prettiest ball-dress, which surely had been made by the fairies, and drag Cyril Rivers at her chariot-wheels, and show him triumphantly how little it mattered to her, made Norah radiant. She rushed in to the Haldanes' side of the house to show herself, in the wildest spirits. Mrs. Haldane and Miss Jane—wonder of wonders—were going too; everybody was to be there. The humble people were asked to behold and ratify the triumph, as well as the fine people to make it. As for Mrs. Haldane, she disapproved, and was a great deal more grim than ordinary; but, for once in a way, because it would be a great thing to see, and because Mr. Baldwin and his sisters were to be there too,—“as

much out of their proper place as we," she said, shaking her head—she had allowed herself to be persuaded. Miss Jane required no persuading. She was honestly delighted to have a chance of seeing anything—the dresses and the diamonds, and Norah dancing with all the grandees. When Norah came in, all in a cloud of tulle and lace, Miss Jane fairly screamed with delight. "I am quite happy to think I shall see the child have one good dance," she said, walking round and round the fairy princess. "Were you fond of dancing yourself, Miss Jane?" said Norah, not without the laugh of youth over so droll an idea. But it was not droll to Miss Jane; she put her hands, which were clothed in black with mittens, on the child's shoulders, and gave her a kiss, and answered not a word. And Stephen looked on from that immovable silent post of his, and saw them both, and thought of the past and present, and all the shadowy uncertain days that were to come. How strange to think of the time when Miss Jane, so grave and prosaic in her old-maidish gown, had been like Norah? How wonderful to think that Norah one day might be as Miss Jane! And so they all went away to the ball together, and Stephen in his chair immovable till his nurses came back, and Susan bustling about in the kitchen, were left in the house alone.

One ball is like another; and except that the Dura ball was more splendid, more profuse in ornament, gayer in banks of flowers, richer in beautiful dresses and finery, more ambitious in music than any ball ever known before in the country, there is little that could be said of it to distinguish it from all others, except, perhaps, the curious fact that the master of the house was not present. He had not been visible all day. He had been telegraphed for to go to town that morning, and had not returned; but then Mr. Golden, who was a far more useful man in a ball-room than the master of the house, was present, and was doing all that became a man to make everything go off brilliantly. He was the slave of the young heroine of the feast to whom everybody was paying homage; and it was remarked by a great many people, that even when going on the arm of Lord Merewether to open the ball, Clara had a suggestion to whisper to this amateur major-domo. "He is such an old friend, he is just the same as papa," she said to her partner with a passing blush; but then Clara was in uncommonly brilliant looks that evening, even for her. Her beautiful colour kept coming and going; there was an air of emo-

tion, and almost agitation about her, which gave a charm to her usually unemotional style of beauty. Lord Merewether, who was under his mother's orders to be "very attentive," almost fell in love with Clara, in excess of his instructions, when he noticed this unusual fluctuation of colour and tone. It supplied just what she wanted, and made the Rubens into a goddess—or so at least this young man thought.

But Helen had not been above an hour in this gay scene when a strange restlessness seized upon her. She did her best to struggle against it; she tried hard to represent to herself that nothing could have happened at home, no post could have come in since she left it, and that Norah needed her there. She saw Mr. Rivers hovering about with his explanation on his lips trying to get at her, since Norah would have nothing to say to him; and felt that it was her duty to remain by her child at such a moment. But, after a while, her nerves, or her imagination, or some incomprehensible influence was too much for her. "You look as if you would faint," Mrs. Dalton whispered to her. "Let Mr. Dalton take you to the air—let Charlie get you something; I am sure you are ill."

"I am not ill; but I must get home. I am wanted at home," said Helen with her brain swimming. How it was that she did it, she never could tell afterwards; but she managed to retain command of herself, to recommend Norah to Mrs. Dalton's care, and finally to steal out; no one noticing her in the commotion and movement that were always going on. When she got into the open air with her shawl wrapped about her, her senses came back. It was foolish, it was absurd—but the deed was done; and, though her restlessness calmed down when she stepped out into the calm of the summer night, it was easier then to go on than to go back; and Norah was in safe hands. It was a moonlight night, as is indispensable for any great gathering in the country. To be sure it was July, and before the guests went home, the short night would be over; but still, according to habit, a moonlight night had been selected. It was soft and warm, and hazy—the light very mellow, and not over bright,—the scent of the flowers and the glitter of the dew filling the air. There was so much moon, and so much light from the house, that Helen was not afraid of the dark avenue. She went on, relieved of her anxiety, feeling refreshed and eased, she could not tell how, by the blowing of the scented night-air in her face. But before she reached the shade of the avenue,

some one rushed across the lawn after her. She turned half round to see who it was, thinking that perhaps Charlie or Mr. Dalton had hurried after her to accompany her home. The figure, however, was not that of either. The man came hurriedly up to her, saying, in a low but earnest tone, "Mrs. Burton, don't take any rash step," when she, as well as he, suddenly started. The voice informed her who spoke, and the sight of her upturned face in the moonlight informed him who listened. "Mrs. Drummond!" he exclaimed. They had not met face to face, nor exchanged words since the time when she denounced him in the presence of Cyril Rivers in St. Mary's Road. "Mrs. Drummond," he repeated, with an uneasy laugh; "of all times in the world for you and me to meet!"

"I hope there is no reason why we should meet," said Helen impetuously. "I am going away. There can be nothing that wants saying between you and me."

"But, by Jove, there is though," he said; "there is reason enough, I can tell you—such news as will make the hair stand upright on your head. Ah! they say revenge is sweet. I shall leave you to find it out to-morrow when everybody knows."

"What is it?" she asked breathlessly, and then stopped, and went on a few steps, horrified at the thought of thus asking information from the man she hated most. He went on along with her, saying nothing. He had no hat on, and the rose in his coat showed a little gleam of colour in the whitening of the light.

"You ought to ask me, Mrs. Drummond," he said; "for revenge, they say, is sweet, and you would be glad to hear."

"I want no revenge," she said hurriedly; and they entered the gloom of the avenue side by side, the strangest pair. Her heart began to beat and flutter—she could not tell why; for she feared nothing from him; and all at once there rose up a gleam of secret triumph in her. This man believed that Robert Drummond was dead, knew no better. What did she care for his news? if indeed she were to tell him hers!

"Well," he said, after an interval, "I see you are resolved not to ask, so I will tell you. I have my revenge in it too, Mrs. Drummond; this night, when they are all dancing, Burton is off, with the police after him. It will be known to all the world to-morrow. You ought to be grateful to me for telling you that."

"Burton is off!—the police—after him!" She did not take in the meaning of the words.

"You don't believe me, perhaps—neither did his wife just now; or at least so she pretended; but it is true. There was a time when he left me to bear the brunt, now it is his turn; and there is a ball at his house the same night!"

She interrupted him hurriedly, "I don't know what you mean. I cannot believe you. What has he done?" she said.

Mr. Golden laughed; and in the stillness his laugh sounded strangely echoing among the trees. He turned round on his heel, waving his hand to her. "Only what all the rest of us have done," he said. "Good night; I am wanted at the ball. I have a great deal to do to-night."

She stood for a moment where he had left her, wondering, half paralyzed. And then she turned and went slowly down the avenue. She felt herself shake and tremble—she could not tell why. Was it this man's voice? Was it his laugh that sounded like something infernal? And what did it all mean? Helen, who was a brave woman by nature, felt a flutter of fear as she quickened her steps and went on. A ball at his house—the police after him. What did it mean? The silence of the long leafy road was so strange and deep after all the sound and movements; the music pursued her from behind, growing fainter and fainter as she went on; the world seemed to be all asleep, except that part of it which was making merry, dancing, and rejoicing at Dura. And now the eagerness to get home suddenly seized upon her again,—something must have happened since she left; some letter; perhaps—some one—come back.

When she got within sight of the Gatehouse, the moon was shining right down the village street as it did when it was at the full. All was quiet, silent, asleep. No, not all. Opposite her house, against the Rectory gates, two men were standing. As she went up into the shadow of the lime-trees, and rang the bell at her own door, one of them crossed the road, and came up to her touching his hat. "Asking your pardon, ma'am," he said, "there is some one in your house, if you're the lady of this house, as oughtn't to be there."

A thrill of great terror took possession of Helen. Her heart leapt to her mouth. "I don't understand you. Who are you? And what do you want?" she asked, almost gasping for breath.

"I'm a member of the detective force. I ain't ashamed of my business," said the man. "We seen him go in, me and my mate."

With your permission, ma'am, we'd like to go through the house."

"Go through my house at this hour!" cried Helen. She heard the door opened behind her, but did not turn round. She was the guardian of the house, she alone, and of all who were in it, be they who they might. Her wits seemed to come to her all at once, as if she had found them groping in the dark. "Have you any authority to go into my house? Am I obliged to let you in? Have you a warrant?"

"They've been a worriting already, ma'am, and you out," said Susan's voice from behind. "What business have they, I'd like to know, in a lady's house at this hour of the night?"

"Has any one come, Susan?" Helen said. "Not a soul."

She was standing with a candle in her hand, holding the door half open. The night air puffed the flame; and perhaps it was that too that made the shadow of Susan's cap tremble upon the panel of the door.

"I cannot possibly admit you at this hour," said Mrs. Drummond. "To-morrow, if you come with any authority; but not to-night."

She went into her own house, and closed the door. How still it was and dark, with Susan's candle only flickering through the gloom! And then Susan made a sudden clutch at her mistress's arm. She held the candle down to Helen's face, and peered in to it, "I've atook him into my own room," she said.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE Gatehouse was full of long, rambling, dark passages with mysterious closets at each elbow of them, or curious little unused rooms—passages which had struck terror to Norah's soul when she was a child, and which even now she thought it expedient to run through as speedily as possible, never feeling sure that she might not be caught by some ghostly intruder behind the half-shut doors. Mrs. Drummond followed Susan through one of these intricate winding ways. It led to a corner room looking out upon the garden, and close to the kitchen, which was Susan's bedchamber. For some forgotten reason or other there was a sort of window, three or four broad panes of glass let into the partition wall high up between this room and the kitchen, the consequence of which was that Susan's room always showed a faint light to the garden. This was her reason for taking it as the hiding-place for the strange guest.

Mrs. Drummond went down the dark passage, feeling herself incapable of speech and almost of thought; a vague wonder why he should be so hotly pursued, and how it was that Susan should have known this and taken it upon herself to receive and shelter one who was a stranger to her, passed through Helen's mind. Both these things were strange and must be inquired into hereafter, but in the meantime her heart was beating too high with personal emotion to be able to think of anything else. Was it possible that thus strangely, thus suddenly, she was to meet him again from whom she had been so long parted? Their last interview rushed back upon her mind, and his appearance then. Seven years ago!—and a man changes altogether, becomes, people say, another being in seven years. This thought quivered vaguely through Helen's mind. So many thoughts went pursuing each other, swift and noiseless as ghosts. It was not above two minutes from the time she came into the hall until she stood at the threshold of Susan's room; but a whole world of questions, of reflections, had hurried through her thoughts. She trembled by intervals with a nervous shiver. Her heart beat so violently that it seemed at once to choke and to paralyze her. To see him again—to stand face to face with him who had come back out of the grave,—to change her whole being,—to be no more herself, no more Norah's mother, but Robert's wife again! Her whole frame began to shake as with one great pulse. It was not joy, it was not fear; it was the wonder of it, the miracle, the strange, strange incomprehensible, incredible—Could he be there?—nothing more between the two who had been parted by death and silence but that closed door?

Susan turned round upon her just before they reached it. Susan, too, hard, bony woman, little given to emotion, was trembling. She wiped her eyes with her apron and gave a sniff that was almost a groan, and thrust the candle into Helen's hand.

"Oh, don't you be hard upon him, Miss Helen as was!" cried Susan with a sob; and turned and fled into her kitchen.

Helen stopped for a moment to steady herself—to steady the light of the poor candle which, held by such agitated, unsteady hands, was flickering wildly in her grasp. And then she opened the door.

Some one started and rose up suddenly with a movement which had at once fear and watchfulness in it. Her agitation blinded her so that she could not see. She held up

the light. If her misty eyes could have made him out,—and then all at once there came a voice which made her nerves steady in a moment, calmed down her pulses, restored to her self-command.

"Helen, is it you? I thought it must be my wife."

The blood rushed back to Helen's heart with an ebb as sudden as the flow had been, making her faint and sick. But the revulsion of feeling was as strong, and gave her strength. The light gave a leap in her hand as she steadied herself, and threw a wild broken gleam upon him.

"Mr. Burton," she said, "what are you doing here?"

"Then the news had not come," he cried, with a certain relief; "nobody knows as yet? Well, well, things are not so bad, then, as I thought."

She put the candle on the table and looked at him. He was dressed in his morning clothes, those light-colored summer garments which made his full person fuller, but which at this hour, and after the scene from which she had just come, looked strangely disorderly and out of place. His linen was crushed and soiled, and his coat, which was of a color and material which showed specks and wrinkles as much as a woman's dress, had the look of having been worn for a week night and day. The air of the vagabond which comes so rapidly to a hunted man had come to him already, and mixed with his habitual air of respectability, of wealth and self-importance, in the most curious, almost pitiful way.

"Tell me," she said, repeating her question almost without knowing what she said, "why are you here?"

He did not answer immediately. He made an effort to put on his usual jaunty look, to speak with his usual jocular superiority. But something—whether it was the flickering, feeble light of the candle which showed him her face, or some instinct of his own, which necessity had quickened into life—made him aware all at once that the woman by his side was in a whirl of mental indecision, that she was wavering between two resolves, and that this was no time to trifle with her. In such circumstances sometimes a man will seize upon the best argument which skill could select, but sometimes also in his haste and excitement he snatches at the one which makes most against him. He said—

"I will tell you plainly, Helen. I am as your husband was when he went down to the river—that night."

She gave a strange and sudden cry, and turning round made one quick step to the door. If she had not seen that Dives in the exhibition, if she had not been in the grip of wild hope and expectation, I think she would have gone straightway, driven by that sudden probing of the old wound, and given him up to his pursuers. At least that would have been her first impulse; but something turned her back. She turned to him again with a sudden fire kindled in her eyes.

"It was you who drove him there," she said.

He made a little deprecating gesture with his hands, but he did not say anything. He saw in a moment that he had made a mistake.

"You drove him there," she repeated, "you and—that man; and now you come to me and think I will save you—to me, his wife. You drove him to despair, to ruin, and you think I am to save you. Why should I? What have you done that I should help you? You had no pity on him; you let him perish, you let him die. You injured me and mine beyond the reach of recovery; and now you put yourself into my hands—with your enemies outside!"

He gave a shudder, and looked at the window as if with a thought of escape; and then he turned round upon her, standing at bay.

"Well," he said, "you have your revenge; I am ruined too. I don't pretend to hide it from you; but I have no river at hand to escape into to hide all my troubles in,—but only a woman to taunt me that I have tried to be kind to—and my wife and my child dancing away close by. Listen; that is what you call comfort for a ruined man, is it not?"

He pointed towards Dura as he spoke. Just then a gust of the soft night-wind brought with it the sound of the music from the great house, that house ablaze with gaiety, with splendour, and light, where Clara Burton all jewelled and crowned with flowers was dancing at this moment, while her mother led the way to the gorgeous table where princes might have sat down. No doubt the whole scene rose before his imagination as it did before Helen's. He sat down upon Susan's rush-bottomed chair with a short laugh. One candle flickering in the dim place revealing all the homely furniture of the servant's bedroom. What a contrast! what a fate! Helen felt as every generous mind feels, humbled before the presence of the immediate sufferer. He had injured her, and she, perhaps, had suffered more deeply than Reginald Burton was capable of suffering;

but it was his turn now; he had the first place. The sorrow was his before which even kings must bow.

While she stood there with pity stealing into her heart, he put down his head into his hands with a gesture of utter weariness.

"Whatever you are going to do," he said faintly, "let Susan give me something to eat first. I have had nothing to eat all day."

This appeal made an end of all Helen's enmity. It had been deep, and hot, and bitter when all was well with him—but the first taste of revenge which Ned's disappearance gave her had appeased Mrs. Drummond. It had been bitter, not sweet. And now this appeal overcame all her defences. If he had asked her to aid in his escape she might have resisted still. But he asked her for a meal. Tears of humiliation, of pitying shame, almost of a kind of tenderness came into her eyes. God help the man! Had it come to this?

She turned into the kitchen, where Susan sat bolt upright in a hard wooden chair before the fire, with her arms folded, the most watchful of sentinels. They had a momentary discussion what there was to set before him, and where it was to be served. Susan's opinion was very strongly in favor of the kitchen.

"Those villains 'ud see the lights to the front," said Susan. "And then Miss Norah, she'll be coming home, and folks with her. Them p-licemen is up to everything. The shutters don't close up to the very top; and if they was to climb into one o' the trees! And besides, there's a fire here."

"It is too warm for a fire, Susan."

"Not for them as is in trouble," said the woman; and she had her way.

Helen arranged the table with her own hands, while Susan made up with her best skill an impromptu meal—not of the richest or choicest, for the larder at the Gatehouse was poorly enough supplied; but fortunately there had been something provided for next day's dinner which was available. And when the fugitive came in to the warm kitchen—he who the day before had made all the household miserable in Dura over the failure of a salmi—he warmed his hands with a shiver of returning comfort, and sniffed the poor cutlet as it cooked, and made a wretched attempt at a joke in the sudden sense of ease and solace that had come to him.

"He was always one for his joke, was Mr. Reginald," Susan said with a sob; and as for Helen, this poor pleasantry completed her prostration. The sight of him warming

himself on this July night, eating so eagerly, like a man famished, filled her with an indescribable pity. It was not so much magnanimity on her part as utter failure on his. How could she lay sins to this man's charge, who was not great enough in himself to frighten a fly? The pity in her heart hurt her like an ache, and she was ashamed.

But what was to be done? She went softly, almost stealthily (with the strange feeling that they might hear her out of doors, of which she was not herself aware), up to her bed-room, which was over the drawing-room, and looked out into the moonlight. The men still kept their place opposite at the Rectory gate—and now a third man, one of the Dura police, with his lantern in his hand, joined them. Helen was a woman full of all the natural prejudices and susceptibilities. Her pride received such a wound by the appearance of this policeman as it would be difficult to describe. Reginald Burton was her enemy, her antagonist; and yet now she remembered her cousin. The Burtons had been of unblemished good fame in all their branches till now. The shame which had been momentarily thrown upon her husband had been connected with so much anguish that Helen's pride had not been called upon most. But now it seized upon her. The moment the Dura policeman appeared, it became evident to her that all the world knew, and the pang ran through her proud heart like a sudden arrow. Her kindred were disgraced, her own blood, the honest, good people in their graves; and Ned—poor, innocent Ned!—at the other end of the world. The pang was so sharp that it forced tears from her, though she was not given to weeping. A policeman! as if the man was a thief who was her own cousin, of her own blood! And then the question returned, What was to be done? I don't know what horrible vision of the culprit dragged through the street, with his ignominy visible to the whole world, rose before Helen's imagination. It did not occur to her that such a capture might be very decorously, very quietly made. She could think of nothing but the poor ragged wretch whom she had once seen handcuffed, his clothes all muddy with the falls he had got in struggling for his liberty, and a policeman on either side of him. This was the only form in which she could realise an arrest by the hands of justice. And to see the master of Dura thus dragged through the village, with all the people round, once so obsequious, staring with stupid, impudent wonder! Anything, anything rather

than that! Helen ran down-stairs again, startling herself with the sound she made. In the quiet she could hear the knife and fork which were still busy in the kitchen, and the broken talk with Susan which the fugitive kept up. She heard him laugh, and it made her heart sick. This time she turned to the other side, to the long passage opposite to that which led to the kitchen, which was the way of communication with the apartments of the Haldanes. The door there, which was generally fastened, was open to-night, and the light was still in Stephen's window, and he himself, for the first time for years, had been left to this late hour in his chair. He was seated there, very still and motionless, when Helen entered. He had dropped asleep in his loneliness. The candles on the table before him threw a strange light upon the pallor of his face, upon the closed eyes, and head thrown back. His hair had grown grey in these seven years; his face had refined and softened in the long suffering, in the patient, still, leaden days which he had lived through, making no complaint. He looked like an apostle in this awful yet gentle stillness—and he looked as if he were dead.

But even Mrs. Drummond's entrance was enough to rouse him—the rustle of her dress, or perhaps even the mere sense that there was some one near him. He opened his eyes dreamily.

"Well, mother, I hope you have enjoyed it," he said, with a smile. Then suddenly becoming aware who his companion was, "Mrs. Drummond! I beg your pardon. What has happened?"

She came and stood by him, holding out her hand, which he took and held between his. There was a mutual pity between these two—a sympathy which was almost tenderness. They were so sorry for each other—so destitute of any power to help each other! Most touching and close of bonds!

"Something has happened," she said.

"Mr. Haldane, I have come to you for your advice."

He looked up at her anxiously.

"Not Norah—not—any one arrived——"

"Oh, no, no; something shameful, painful, terrible. You know what is going on at the great house. Mr. Haldane, Reginald Burton is here in Susan's kitchen, hidden, and men watching for him outside. Men—policemen! That is what I mean. And oh! what am I to do?"

He held her hand still, and his touch kept

her calm. He did not say anything for a minute, except one low exclamation under his breath.

"Sit down," he said. "You are worn out. Is it very late?"

"Past midnight. By-and-by your mother will be back. Tell me first, while we are alone and can speak freely, what can I do?"

"He is hiding here," said Stephen, "and policemen outside? Then he is ruined, and found out. That is what you mean. Compose yourself, and tell me, if you can, what you know, and what you *wish* to do."

"Oh, what does my wish matter?" she cried. "I am asking you what is possible. I know little more than I tell you. He is here, worn-out, miserable, ruined, and the men watching to take him. I don't know how it has happened, why he came, or how they found it out; but so it is. They are there now in front of the house. How am I to get him out?"

"Is that the only question?" Stephen, asked.

She looked at him with an impatience she could not restrain.

"What other question can there be, Mr. Haldane? In a few minutes they will be back."

"But there is another question," he said. "I believe this man has been our ruin—yours and mine—yours, Mrs. Drummond, more fatally than mine. Golden was but one of his instruments, I believe—as guilty, but not more so. He has ruined us, and more than us——"

She wrung her hands in her impatience.

"Mr. Haldane, I hear steps. We may but have a moment more."

He put his hand upon her arm.

"Think!" he cried. "Are we to let him go—to save him that he may ruin others? Is it just? Think what he has made us all suffer. Is there to be no punishment for him?"

"Oh, punishment!" she cried. "Do you know what punishment means, when you make yourself the instrument of it? It means revenge; and there is nothing so bitter, nothing so terrible, as to see your own handiwork, and to think, 'It was not God that did this; it was me.'"

"How can you tell?"

"Oh, yes, I can tell. There was his son. I thought it was a just return for all the harm he had done when his poor boy—But Ned went away, and left everything. It was not my fault; it was not Norah's fault. Yet she had done it, and I had wished

she might. No; no more revenge. How can I get him away?"

"I am not so forgiving as you," he said.

Helen could not rest. She rose up from the seat she had drawn to his side, and went to the window. There were steps that frightened her moving about outside, and then there was the sound of voices.

"Come in and go over the house! Come in at this hour of the night!" said a voice. It was Miss Jane's voice, brisk and alert as usual. Helen hurried into the hall, to the door, where she could hear what was said.

"But Jane, Jane, if anyone has got in? A thief—perhaps a murderer! Oh, my poor Stephen!"

"Nonsense, mother! If you like to stay outside there, I'll go over all the house with Susan, and let you know. Why, Mrs. Drummond! Here are some men who want to come in to search for some one at this time of night."

"I have told them already they should not come in," said Helen.

She had opened the door, and stood in front of it with a temerity which she scarcely felt justified in; for how did she know they might not rush past her, and get in before she could stop them? Such was her idea—such was the idea of all the innocent people in the house. The Dura policeman was standing by with his truncheon and his lantern.

"I've told 'em, mum, as it's a mistake," said that functionary; "and that this 'ere is the quietest, most respectable 'ouse—"

"Thanks, Wilkins," said Helen.

It was a positive comfort to her, and did her good, this simple testimony. And to think that Wilkins knew no better than that!

"Will you keep near the house?" she said, turning to him, with that feeling that he was "on our side" which had once prepossessed Norah in favour of Mr. Rivers. "My daughter will be coming back presently, and I don't want to have her annoyed or frightened with this story. No one except the people who belong to it shall enter this house to-night."

"As you please, ma'am; but I hope you knows the penalty," said the detective.

Helen did not know of any penalty, nor did she care. She was wound up to so high a strain of excitement, that had she been coiled upon to put her arm in the place of the bolt, or do any other futile heroic piece of resistance, she would not have hesitated. She closed the door upon Mrs. Haldane and

her daughter, one of whom was frightened and the other excited. As they all came into the hall, Susan became visible, with her candle in her hand, defending the passage to the kitchen. Something ludicrous, something pathetic and tragic and terrible was in the aspect of the house, and its guardians—had one been wise enough to perceive what it meant.

"If Susan will come with me," said Miss Jane briskly, "after that idiot of a man's romance, my mother will think we are all going to be murdered in our beds. If Susan will come with me, I'll go over all the house."

"We have examined ours," said Helen. "Susan, go with Miss Jane. Mrs. Haldane, Mr. Stephen is tired, I think."

"Stephen must not be alarmed," said Mrs. Haldane with hesitation. "But are you sure it is safe? Do you really think it is safe? You see, after all, when our door is open it is one house. A man might run from one room to another. Oh, Jane—Mrs. Drummond—if you will believe me, I can see a shadow down that passage! Oh, my dear, you are young and rash! The men will know better; let them come in."

"I cannot allow them to come in. There is no one, I assure you, except your son, who wants your help."

"You are like Jane," said the old lady; "you are so bold and rash. Oh, I wish I had begged them to stay all night. I wouldn't mind giving a shilling or two. Think if Stephen should be frightened! Oh, yes, I am going; but don't leave me, dear. I couldn't be alone; I shall be frightened of my life."

This was how it was that Helen was in Stephen's room again when Miss Jane came down, bustling and satisfied.

"You may make yourself perfectly easy, mother. We have gone over all the rooms—looked under the beds and in the cupboards, and there is not a ghost of anything. Poor Susan is tired sitting up for us all; I told her I'd wait up for Norah. Well, now you don't ask any news of the ball, Stephen. Norah has danced the whole evening; I have never seen her sitting down once. Her dress is beautiful; and as for herself, my dear! But everybody was looking their best. I don't admire Clara Burton in a general way; but really Clara Burton was something splendid—Yes, yes, mother; of course we must get Stephen to bed."

"Good-night," said Helen, going up to him. She looked in his face wistfully; but now the opportunity was over, and what

could he say? He held her hand a moment, feeling the tremor in it.

"Good night," he said; and then very low he added hurriedly, "The gate into the Dura woods—the garden door."

"Thanks," she said, with a loud throb of her heart.

The excitement, the suspense, were carrying Helen far beyond her will or intention. She had been sensible of a struggle at first whether she would not betray the fugitive. Now her thoughts had progressed so fast and far, that she would have fought for him, putting even her slight strength in the way to defend him or protect his retreat. He was a man whom she almost hated; and yet all her thoughts were with him, wondering was he safe by himself, and what could be done to make him safer still. She left the Haldane's side of the house eagerly, and hurried down the passage to the kitchen. He was there, in Susan's arm-chair before the fire. His meal was over, and he had turned to the fire again, and fallen into a doze. While she was moving about in a fever of anxiety, he himself, with his head sunk on his breast, was unconscious of his own danger. Helen, who felt incapable of either resting or sleep, stood still and looked at him in a sort of stupor.

"Poor dear, poor dear!" said Susan, holding up her hand in warning, "he's been worried and worn out, and he's dozed off—the best thing he could do."

He might rest, but she could not. She went down the few steps to the garden, and stole out into the night, cautiously opening and closing the door. The garden was walled all round. It was a productive, wealthy garden, which, even when the Gatehouse had been empty, was worth keeping up, and its doors and fastenings were all in good order. There was no chance of any one getting in by that side. Mrs. Drummond stole out into the white moonlight, which suddenly surged upon her figure, and blazoned it all over with silver, and crept round, trembling at every pebble she disturbed, to the unused door which opened into the Dura woods. It

had been made that there might be a rapid means of communication between the Gatehouse and the mansion, but it had never been used since the Drummonds came. She had forgotten this door until Stephen reminded her of its existence. It was partially hid behind a thicket of raspberry-bushes, which had grown high and strong in front. Fortunately, a rusted key was in the lock. With the greatest difficulty Helen turned it, feeling as if the sound, as it grated and resisted, raised whirlwinds of echoes all round her, and must betray what she was doing. Even when it was unlocked, it took all her strength to pull it open, for she could do no more. For one moment she pressed out into the dark, rustling woods. Through the foliage she could see the glance of the lights from the house and the moving flicker of carriage-lamps going down the avenue. The music came upon her with a sudden burst like an insult. Oh, heaven! to think that all this should be going on, the dancing and laughter, and *him* dozing there by Susan's kitchen fire!

She paused a little in the garden in the stillness—not for rest, but that she might arrange her thoughts without interruption. But there was no stillness there that night. The music came to her on the soft wind, now lower, now louder; the sound of the carriage-wheels coming and going kept up a low, continuous roll; now and then there would come the sound of a voice. It was still early; only a few timid guests who feared late hours, old people and spectators like the Haldanes, were leaving the ball. It was in full career. The very sky seemed flushed over Dura House, with its numberless lights.

Helen formed her plan as she crept about the garden in the moonlight. Oh, if some kindly cloud would but rise, and veil for a little this poor earth with its mysteries! But all was clear, well seen, visible; the clear night and the blue heavens were not pitiful, like Helen. Man is often hard upon man, heaven knows, yet it is man only who can feel for the troubles of mankind.

PART XI.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHILE her mother was thus occupied Norah was taking her fill of pleasure. She "danced every dance"—beatific fulfilment of every girlish wish in respect to a ball. She was so young and so fresh that this perpetual motion filled up the measure of her desires, and left her little time to think. To be sure, once or twice it had come over her that Ned, poor Ned, was not here to share in all this delight; and if Norah had been destitute of partners, or less sought than she thought her due, no doubt her heart would have been very heavy on account of Ned. But she had as many partners as ever a neophyte could claim, and she had no time to think. She was as happy as the night was long. The dancing was delightful to her for itself, the music was delightful, the "kindness" of everybody, which was Norah's modest, pretty synonym for the admiration she received, and she asked no more of heaven than this, which she was receiving in such full measure. To be sure, her mother's disappearance disturbed her for the moment. But when Mrs. Dalton had sworn by all the gods that Mrs. Drummond was not ill, Norah resigned herself once more to her happy fate.

There was, at the same time, a special point which exhilarated Norah, satisfied her pride, and raised her spirits. During all the festivities of the afternoon she had kept Cyril Rivers at arm's length. Perhaps if he had not shown so much anxiety to approach nearer, Norah would not have felt the same satisfaction in this, but his explanation, it was evident, was hanging on his very lips, and she had triumphantly kept him from making it. The same process was repeated in the evening. She had rushed into a perfect crowd of engagements in order to escape him. Poor Charlie Dalton, whom Clara had no longer any thought of, and whose occupation for the greater part of the evening was standing about, dolefully gazing after her, was pressed unceremoniously into Norah's service. Once, when she happened to be disengaged and saw Cyril approaching, she was so lost to all sense of shame as to seize him breathlessly by the arm. "Dance this dance with me, Charlie," she whispered impatiently.

"Why must I dance?" said the poor boy, who had no heart for it.

"Because I am determined not to dance with him," said Norah, energetically leading off her captive. And thus she kept the other at a distance, and kept him from speaking; but perhaps she would have been less rigid in evasion had he been more indifferent to the opportunity. It was late in the night, after supper, when he secured her at last.

"Miss Drummond, you have avoided me all night——"

"I!" cried Norah, "but that is ridiculous. Why should I avoid you, Mr. Rivers? Indeed I am sure I have spoken to you at least a dozen times this evening. It is not one's own fault when one is engaged."

"And I have been so anxious to see you—to explain to you," he cried, his eagerness, and the long, tantalizing delay having overcome his wisdom. "I have been quite miserable."

"About what, Mr. Rivers?"

"About what you must have thought very abominable behaviour that day at the pictures; fancy, it is two months since, and you have never allowed me a moment in which I could say it till now."

"At the pictures?" said Norah, feigning surprise. "I don't think we have seen you very often lately, Mr. Rivers; and two months is a long time to remember. Oh, I recollect! you left us in a hurry."

"My mother had come to look for me—there was some business in hand that I had to be consulted about. I cannot tell you what a wretched ass I felt myself, dragged away without a moment to explain—without even time to say, 'This is my mother.'"

"Mr. Rivers," said Norah, drawing her small person to its full height, and loosing her hold of his arm, "I think it would have been good taste not to say anything about this. When we did not remark upon it, why should you? I am only a girl, I am nineteen, and I never disobeyed mamma that I know of; but still, do you think I should have let her carry me off like a baby from my friends whom I cared for, without a word? There are some things that one ought not to be asked to believe. You were not obliged to say anything at all about it. I should like to be polite, but I can't make myself a fool to please you. And, on the other hand, you know Lady Rivers is nothing to us. I did not ask to be introduced to her, and poor mamma was too ill even to know. Please

don't say any more about it. It would have been much better not to have mentioned it at all."

"But, Miss Drummond!—"

"Yes, I know. You wanted to be polite. But never mind. I am quite, quite satisfied," said Norah with a gleam of triumph. "Look here! Let us have Katie for our *vis-a-vis*. Don't you think Clara Burton is looking quite beautiful to-night?"

Mr. Rivers did not reply. He said to himself that he had never been so completely snubbed in his life. He had never felt so small, so cowed, and that is not pleasant to a man. Her very pardon, her condonation of his offence, was humbling to him. Had she resented it, he had a hundred weapons with which to meet her resentment; but he had not one to oppose to her frank indignation, and her pardon. And yet, with curious perversity, never before had Norah seemed so sweet to him. He had felt the wildest jealousy of poor Charlie during that dance, which he went through so unwillingly, and but for the cheerful strains of the Lancers, which commenced at this point, and set them all—so many who enjoyed it, so many who did not enjoy it—in motion, it was in his mind to commit himself as he had never yet done—to throw himself upon her mercy. This thought gave to his handsome face a look which Norah in her triumph secretly enjoyed, and called "sentimental." "But I am not one of those girls that fall down and worship a man, and think him a demigod," Norah said to herself. "He is no demigod! he has not so much courage as I have. He is frightened of—me! Oh, if Ned were but here!" This last little private exclamation was accompanied with the very ghost of a sigh—half of a quarter of a sigh, Norah would have said, had she described it—Ned was afraid of her too, and was not the least like a demigod. I do not defend Norah for her sauciness, nor do I blame her; for, after all, the young men of the present day are very unlike demigods; and there are some honest girls left in the world capable of loving a man as his wife ought, without worshipping him as his slave, and without even bowing herself down in delicious inferiority before him, grovelling as so many heroines do. Norah was incapable of grovelling under any circumstances; but then she had been brought up by her mother in the traditions of womanly training, such as they used to be in a world which we are told is past.

This is the very worst place in the world for a digression, I allow; it is to permit of the dancing of that figure which they were just

about to commence, Clara Burton was dancing in the same set, with Mr. Golden. And as her own partner for this little episode was for some time anything but lively, Norah gave her mind to the observation of Clara. Clara and Mr. Golden were great friends. She had said to Lord Merewether that he was like papa, but it may be doubted whether papas generally, even when most indulgent, are looked up to by their children as Clara looked up to her father's friend. All Dura had remarked upon it before now; all Dura had wondered, did the parents see it? What did Mrs. Burton mean by permitting it? But it never once entered into Mrs. Burton's cool, clever little head to fancy it possible that the attractions of such a man could move her child. Everybody in the neighbourhood, except those most concerned, had seen Clara wandering with this man, who was nearly as old as her father, through the Dura woods. Everybody had seen the flushed, eager, tender way in which she hung upon him, and looked up to him; and his constant devotion to her. "If I were you I should speak to Mr. Burton about it," the rector's wife had said half a dozen times over; but the rector had that constitutional dislike to interfere in anything which is peculiar to Englishmen. That night Clara was beautiful, as Norah had said; she was full of agitation and excitement—even of something which looked like feeling; her colour was splendid, her blue eyes as blue as the sea when it is stirred, her hair like masses of living gold, her complexion like the flushings of the sunset upon snow. As for her partner, a certain air of warning mingled in his assiduity. Once Norah saw him hold up his finger, as if in remonstrance. He was wary, watchful, observant of the glances round him; but Clara, who never restrained herself, put on no trammels to-night. She stood looking up to him, talking to him incessantly, forgetting the dance, and, when she was compelled to remember it, hurrying through the figure that she might resume the intermitted conversation. Gradually the attention of the other dancers became concentrated on her. It was her moment of triumph, no doubt—her birthday, her coming of age as it were, though she was but eighteen—her entry, many people thought, into the glory of heiress-ship. But all this was not enough to account for the intoxication of excitement, the passion that blazed in Clara's eyes. What did it mean? When the dance was over, the majority of the dancers made their way into the coolness of the conservatory, which was lighted with soft lamps. Mr. Rivers

took Norah back to Mrs. Dalton. His dark eyes had grown larger, his air more sentimental than ever. He withdrew a little way apart, and folded his arms, and stood gazing at her, just, Norah reflected with impatience, as a man would do who was the hero in a novel. But very different ideas were in Norah's mind. She seized upon Charlie once more, who was sentimental too. "Come out on the terrace with me. I want to speak to Clara," she said. They were stopped just inside the open window by a stream of people coming in for the next dance. Norah had been pushed close to the window, half in half out, by the throng. This was how she happened to hear the whispered talk of a pair outside, who were close by her without knowing it, and whom nobody else could hear.

"At the top of the avenue, at three o'clock. Wrap a cloak round you, my darling. In the string of carriages ours will never be noticed. It is the best plan."

"And everything is ready?" asked another voice, which was Clara's.

"Everything, my love! In an hour and a half—"

"For you! I could do it only for you!"

In a minute after the two came in, pushing past Norah and her companion, who, both pale as statues, let them pass. The others were not pale. Clara's face was dyed with vivid colour, and Mr. Golden, bending over her, looked almost young in glow of animation and admiration with which he gazed at her. Charlie Dalton had not heard the scrap of dialogue, which meant so much; but he ground his teeth and stared at his supplanter, and crushed Norah's hand which held his arm. "That fellow!" Charlie said between his teeth. "Had it been some one else, I might have borne it."

"Oh, Charlie, take me back to your mother," cried Norah. Her thoughts went like the wind; already she had made out her plan, but what was the use of saying anything to him, poor simpleton, to make him more unhappy? Norah went back, and placed herself by Mrs. Dalton's side. "I do not mean to dance any more. I am tired," she said; and though the music tempted her, and her poor little feet danced in spite of her, keeping time on the floor, she did not change her resolution. Mr. Rivers came, finding the opportunity he sought; but Norah paid no heed to him. The men whose names were written upon her card came too, in anxiety and dismay. But to all she had the same answer, "I am tired. I will dance no more to-night."

"Let me look at you, child," said kind Mrs. Dalton; "indeed you look tired—you look as if you had seen a ghost."

"And so I have," said Norah. She felt as if she must cry. Clara Burton had been her playfellow, almost her sister, as near to her as Katie, and as much beloved. What was it Clara was going to do? The child shivered in her terror. When the dancers were all in full career once more, Norah put her mouth close to Mrs. Dalton's ear and whispered forth her story. "What can we do? What can we do?" she asked. It would be impossible to describe Mrs. Dalton's consternation. She remonstrated, struggled against the idea, protested that there must be some mistake. But still Norah asked, "What can we do? what can we do?"

"My dear Norah! see, they are not near each other—they are not looking at each other. You have made a mistake."

"Why should they look at each other? everything is arranged and settled," said Norah. "Mrs. Dalton, if you will not come with me, I will go myself. Clara must not be allowed to go. Oh, only think of it! Clara, one of us. I have made up my plan, and if you will not come, I will go myself."

"Norah, where will you go? What can you do—a child? And, oh, how can I go, and leave the girls?" replied Mrs. Dalton in her distress.

"You can leave them with Charlie," said Norah. It had struck two before this explanation was made, and already a few additional guests had begun to depart. There was very little time to lose. Before Mrs. Dalton was aware she found herself hurried into the cloak-room, wrapped in some wrap which was not hers, and out under the moonlight again, scarcely knowing how she got there.

"This is not my cloak, Norah," she said piteously; "my cloak was white."

"Never mind, dear Mrs. Dalton; white would have been seen," said Norah, who was far too much excited to think of larceny. And then, impetuous as a little sprite, she led her friend round the farther side of the lawn, and placed her under the shadow of a clump of evergreens. "There is a brougham standing here which never budges," whispered Norah, "with a white horse. I have seen him driving a white horse. Now stand very still. Oh, do stand still, please."

"But, Norah, I see no one. It is Mrs. Ashurst's old white horse; it is the fly from the inn. Norah, it is very cold. Our car-

riage will be coming. If it comes while we are gone——"

Norah grasped her tremulous companion by the arm. "You would go barefoot from here to London," she said in her ear, with a voice which was husky with excitement, "to save any one, you know you would; and this is Clara—Clara!"

Some one came rapidly across the green—a dark-veiled, hooded figure, keeping in the shadow. The morning was breaking in the east and mingled mysteriously with the moonlight, making a weird paleness all about among the dark trees and bushes. There was such a noise and ceaseless roll of carriages passing, of servants waiting about, of impatient horses, pawing and tossing their heads, that the very air was full of confusion. Mrs. Dalton's alarm was undecipherable. She held back the impetuous girl by her side, who was rushing upon that new-comer.

"Norah! it is some lady looking for her carriage. Norah!"

Norah paid no heed; she rushed forward, and laid hold upon the long grey cloak in which the new-comer was muffled. "Clara!" she cried. "Oh, Clara! stop, stop! and come back."

At this moment there suddenly appeared among them another figure, in an overcoat, with a soft felt hat slouched over his face, who took Clara by the hand and whispered, "Quick! there is not a moment to lose."

"Is it you, Norah?" said Clara from under her cloak. "You spy! you prying inquisitive!—Go back yourself. You have nothing to do with me!"

"Oh, Clara!" cried the other girl, clasping her hands, "don't go away like this. It is almost morning. They will see you—in your ball dress. Clara, Clara, dear! Hate me if you like—only, for heaven's sake, come back."

And now Mrs. Dalton crept out from the shadow of the bushes. "Mr. Golden, leave her. Let her go. How dare you over-persuade a child like that? Let her go, or I will call out to stop you. Clara!"

He pushed them apart—one to one side, one to the other. "Quick," he cried, with a low call to a servant who stood close by. "Quick, Clara! don't lose a moment." He had pushed them aside roughly, and stood guarding her retreat, facing round upon them. "What is it to you," he said, "if I am employed to take Miss Burton to her father? You may call any one you please—you may go and tell her mother. I am coming—now, for your life!"

The brougham dashed off with dangerous speed, charging, as it seemed, into the mass of carriages. There was a tumult and trampling of horses, a cry as of some man hurt; but all that the two terrified women on the lawn saw was Clara's face, looking back at them from the carriage window, with an insolent, triumphant look. She had partially thrown off her cloak, and appeared from under it in her white dress, a beautiful strange vision—and then there came the sound of the collision and conflict, and the struggles of horses, and the cry. But whoever was wounded, it was not anybody belonging to that equipage. The white horse could be traced down the avenue like a long, lessening streak of light. So far, at least, the scheme had been successful. They were gone.

Norah could not speak; she walked about upon the lawn, among the servants, wringing her hands. The morning dew, which was beginning to fall, shone wet upon her hair.

"What can we do—what can we do?" she cried.

"My dear child, we have done all we can. Oh, that foolish, foolish girl! Norah, your feet must be wet, and so I am sure are mine; and your pretty white tarlatan all spoiled. Oh, heaven help us! is this what it has all come to? I dare not send Charlie after them. Norah, run and call Mr. Dalton. He might go, perhaps. Norah, oh, you must not go alone," cried the rector's wife.

But Norah was gone. She rushed into the house, through all the departing guests, her cloak and her hair all wet with dew. She made her way into the ball-room in that plight, and rushed up to Mr. Dalton, and led him alarmed out into the hall. Mrs. Dalton followed, and was slowly gathering up her dress. Her heart was full of dismay and trouble, that Clara should thus destroy herself—break her parents' hearts! And Norah must have certainly spoilt her pretty new dress. "One would not have minded had it done any good," she murmured within herself. When they met the rector in the hall, a hurried consultation ensued.

"Take our fly, George," said Mrs. Dalton heroically. "We can get home somehow. Take it! They cannot be very far gone—you may overtake them yet."

"Overtake them! though I don't even know which way they have gone," said the rector, fretful with this strange mission. But, all the same, he went off, and hunted out the fly, and offered the driver half a sovereign if he could overtake the brougham with a white

horse. But everything retarded Mr. Dalton. His horse was but a fly horse, not the most lively of his kind. The man had been drinking Miss Burton's health and was more disposed to continue that exercise than to gallop vaguely about the roads, even with the promise of an additional half-sovereign. Mrs. Dalton, in the meanwhile, threw off her borrowed cloak, and went into the almost deserted ball-room in search of the mistress of the house, and Mary and Katie, wondering and shivering, standing close to Charlie, who was their protector for the moment, made a group round Norah in the hall, with the daylight every moment brightening over their faces, weariness stealing over them, and mystery oppressing them, and no appearance of either father or mother, or the fly!

Norah leant against Katie's shoulder and cried. After all her impetuous exertion the reaction was sharp. She could not give any explanations, but leant upon her friend, and cried, and shivered.

"Oh, where can mamma be? Where is the fly? Oh, Norah, have my cloak too; I don't want it. How cold you are! Charlie, run and look for the fly," cried Katie. They stood all clinging together, while the people streamed past, getting into their carriages going away. The daylight grew clearer, the sun began to rise, while still they stood there forlorn. And what with weariness, what with wonder and anxiety and vexation, Mary and Katie were almost crying too.

Finally Mrs. Dalton appeared, when almost all the guests were gone, with a flush on her kind face, and an energy which triumphed over her weariness. "Come, children, we must pluck up our courage and walk," she said. "Take up your dresses, girls, and help Norah with hers. Poor child, perhaps the walk will be the best thing. It is no use waiting for the fly."

Then Charlie came back to report that the fly was nowhere visible, but that some one who had been knocked down by a runaway horse was being carried up to the house, much injured. "A white horse in a brougham. They say it took fright, and dashed down the avenue; and they are afraid the man is badly hurt," said Charlie. The ladies shuddered as the poor fellow was carried past them, his head bound round with a handkerchief stained with blood. They were the last to leave, and came down the steps just as this figure was being carried in. It was broad daylight now, and they all felt guilty and miserable in their ball dresses.

This was how the last ball ended which was given by the Burtons in Dura House.

They walked down weary, feeling some weight upon them which the majority of the party did not understand, all the length of the leafy avenue, where the birds were singing, and the new morning sending arrows of gold. The fly, with Mr. Dalton in it, very tired and fretful, met them at the gate. He had not so much as come within sight of the brougham with the white horse. But yet he was ready to go up to the great house as duty demanded, to put himself at the service of its mistress. Charlie, enlightened all in a moment as to the meaning of the night's proceedings, went with him, like a ghost of misery and wrath. The girls and the mother went home alone through the sunshine. And the echoes grew still about that centre of tumult and rejoicing. The rejoicing had ended now; and, with that feast, the reign of the Burtons at Dura had come to an end.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A SUMMER night passes quickly to those who have need of darkness for their movements. When Mrs. Drummond found herself at liberty to carry out the plan she had formed, the time before her was very short. She went back to the kitchen, and called Susan to her. Mr. Burton woke up as she came in, and they had a hurried consultation; the consequence of which was that Susan was sent to the stables, which were not very far from the garden door of the Gatehouse, to order a carriage to be dispatched instantly to pick up Mr. Burton at the Northgate, two miles off, in the opposite direction from the village. He could walk thus through the ground by paths he was familiar with, and drive to a station five miles further off on another railway. So readily do our innocence and ignorance fall into the shifty ways of guilt that this was Helen's plan. He was to wait here till Susan returned, and the experiment of her going would be a proof if the way was quite safe for him. When Susan was gone Mrs. Drummond returned alone to where her guest sat before the kitchen fire. She had her blotting-book under her arm, and an inkstand in her hand. "Before you go," she said in a low voice, "I want you to do something for me."

"I will do anything for you," he cried—"anything! Helen, I have not deserved it. You might have treated me very differently. You have been my salvation."

"Hush!" she said. His thanks recalled her old feelings of distrust and dislike rather

than the new ones of pity. She put down her writing things on the table. "I have my conditions as well as other people," she said. "I want now to know the truth."

"What truth?"

"About Rivers's," she said.

"Helen!"

"It is useless for you to resist or deny me," she replied, "you are in my power. I am willing to do everything to serve you, but I will have a full explanation. Write it how you please, but you shall not leave this place till you have given me the means, when I please and how I please, of proving the truth."

"What is the truth, as you call it?" he said sullenly; "what have I to do with it? Drummond and the rest went into it with their eyes open; all the accounts of the concern were open to them."

"I do not pretend to understand it," said Helen. "But you do. Here are pens and paper. I insist upon a full explanation—how it was that so flourishing a business perished in three years, where those books went to, which Robert was so falsely accused of destroying. Oh, are you not afraid to tire out my patience? Do you know that you are in my power?"

He gave an alarmed look at her. He had forgotten everything but those fables about feminine weakness which are current among such men, and had half laughed in his sleeve half an hour before at her readiness to help and serve him. But now all at once he perceived that laughter was out of place, and there was no time to lose. The reflection that ran through his mind was—All must come out in a week or two—it will do her no good; but it can do me no harm. "If I am to give an account of the whole history it will take me hours," he said. "I may as well give up all thought of getting away to-night." But he drew the blotting-book towards him. Helen did not relax nor falter. She lighted another candle; she left him to himself with a serious belief in his good faith which startled him. She moved about the kitchen while he wrote, filling a small flask with wine out of the solitary bottle which had been brought out for his refreshment, and which represented the entire cellar of the Gatehouse—even brushing the coat which he had thrown aside, that it might be ready for him. The man watched her with the wonder of an inferior nature. He had loved her once, and it had given him a true pleasure to humble her when the moment came. But now the ascendancy had returned into

her hands. Had he been in her place how he would have triumphed! But Helen did not triumph. His misery did not please, it bowed her down to the ground. She was sad—suffering for him, ashamed, anxious. He did not understand it. Gradually, he could not have told how, her look affected him. He tore up the first statement he had commenced, a florid, apologetic narrative. He tore up the second, in which he threw the blame upon the ignorance of business of poor Drummond and his fellow-directors. Finally he was moved so strangely out of himself that he wrote the simple truth, and no more, without a word of apology or explanation. Half-a-dozen lines was enough for that. The apology would, as he said, have taken hours.

And then Susan came back. By this time he had written not only the explanation required of him, but a letter to his wife, and was ready to try his fate once more. Helen herself went with him to the garden door; the path through the woods was dark, hidden from the moonlight by the close copses and high fence, which it skirted for many a mile. And there would not be daylight to betray him for at least an hour. He stood on the verge of the dark wood, and took her hand. "Helen, you have saved me; God bless you," he said. And in a moment this strange episode was over, as though it had never been. She stood under the rustling trees, and listened to his footsteps. The night wind blew chill in her face, the dark boughs swayed round her as if catching at her garments. A hundred little crackling sounds, echoes, movements among the copse, all the jars and broken tones of nature that startle the fugitive, made her heart beat with terror. If she had felt a hand on her shoulder, seizing her instead of him, Helen would not have been surprised. But while she stood and listened all the sounds seemed to die away again in the stillness of the night. And the broad moonlight shone, silvering the black trees, out of which all individuality had fled, and the music from Dura came back in a gust, and the roll of the carriages slowly moving about the avenue, waiting for the dancers. And but that Helen stood in so unusual a spot, with that garden door half open behind her, and the big key in her hand, she might have thought that all this was nothing more than a dream.

She went in, and locked the door, and then returned to Susan's kitchen. It was her turn now to feel the cold, after her excitement was over; she went in shivering, and drew

close to the fire. She put her head down into her hands. The tears came to her eyes unawares, weariness had come upon her all at once, when the necessity of exertion was over. She held in her hand the paper she had made Burton write, but she had not energy enough to look at it. Would it ever be of any use to her? Would he whom it concerned ever return? Or was all this—the picture, the visit to the Exhibition, the sudden conviction which had seized upon her—were these all so many delusions in her dream? After a while Miss Jane, all unconscious, excited with her unusual pleasure, and full of everything she had seen, came and sat by her and talked. "I told Susan to go to bed," said Miss Jane; "and I wish you would go too, Mrs. Drummond. I will sit up for Norah. Oh, how proud I was of that child to-night! I suppose it's very wrong, you know—so my mother says—but I can't help it. It is just as well I am a single woman, and have no children of my own; for I should have been a fool about them. The worst of all is that we shan't keep her long. She will marry, and then what shall we do? I am sure to lose her would break Stephen's heart."

"She is very young," said Helen, who answered for civility's sake alone, and who with all the heavy thought in her heart and apprehensions for the fugitive, would have given much to be left to herself.

"Yes, she is young; but not too young to do a great deal of mischief. When I saw all those men on their knees before her!" cried Miss Jane, with a laugh of triumph. She had never been an object of much admiration or homage herself; men had not gone on their knees to her, though no doubt she was more worthy than many of the foolish creatures who have been so worshipped; but the result of this was that Miss Jane enjoyed heartily the other revenge which other women had it in their power to take for all the slights and scorns to which she and her homely sisters had been subjected. She liked to see "them" punished, though "they" were an innocent, new generation, blameless so far as she was concerned. She would not have injured a fly; but her face beamed all over with delight at the thought that it was Norah's mission to break hearts.

Thus the good soul sat and talked, while Helen listened to every sound, and wondered where was he now? what might be happening? She did not even hear what was being said to her until Miss Jane fell into a moralising vein. "The Burtons are at the height

of their splendour now," she said. "I never saw anything so grand as it was. I don't think anything could be grander. But oh, Mrs. Drummond, people's sins find them out. There's Clara getting bewitched by that man; everybody could see it. A man old enough to be her father, without a scrap of character, and no money even, I suppose. Think of that! and oh, what will all their grandeur do for them, with Ned at the other end of the world, and Clara throwing herself away?"

"Oh, hush, hush!" cried Helen. "Don't prophesy any more misfortune; there is enough without that."

And five minutes after Norah came to the door, surrounded by the party from the Rectory, all pale and terror-stricken, with the news which they felt to be so terrible. "Clara has gone away!" They stood at the door and told this tale, huddled together in the fresh sunshine, the girls crying, the elder women asking each other, "what would the Burtons do?" "She was almost rude to me. She sent me away," Mrs. Dalton said, "or I should have stayed with her. And Mr. Burton is not there! What will she do?" They could scarcely make up their minds to separate, worn out and miserable as they all were. And opposite, in the morning sunshine, two men still watched the Gatehouse, as they had watched it all through the night.

These miseries all ended in a misery which was comic, had any of them had heart enough left to laugh. While she helped to undress Norah, Miss Jane suddenly uttered a scream, which made Helen tremble from head to foot. She had caught in her hands the pretty flounces of that white dress, that lovely dress, Dr. Maurice's present, which had turned poor little Cinderella—Norah—into an enchanted princess; but now, alas, all limp, damp, ruined! even stained with the dewy grass and gravel across which it had come. Miss Jane could have cried with vexation and dismay. This was the climax of all the agonies of that wonderful night. But, fortunately, it was not so hopeless as the others. An hour later, when the house was all silent, and even Helen lay with her eyes shut, longing to sleep, Miss Jane stole downstairs again, carrying this melancholy garment on her arm. She went to Susan's kitchen, where the fire was burning, and, spreading it out upon the big table, took it to pieces to see what could be done. And then she made a discovery which drew from her a cry of joy. The dress was *grenadine*, not tulle! Dear, ignorant reader, perhaps you do

not know what this means? but well did Miss Jane understand. "Grenadine will wash!" she said to herself triumphantly. She was a clever woman, and she was not unconscious of the fact. She would wash and starch with any professional. Accordingly, she set to work with scissors and soap and starch and hot irons; but, above all, with love, love, which made the fingers cunning and the courage strong.

Mr. Burton made his escape safely. He had reached the North-gate before the dog-cart did, which came up for him just as the morning was breaking. With this delay it so happened that when he reached the station to which he was bound a brougham with a white horse appeared in sight behind, and gave him a thrill of terror; it was not a likely vehicle certainly for his pursuers; but still it was possible that they might have found nothing more suitable had they got scent of him at Dura. He sprang out of the dog-cart accordingly, and took refuge in one of the corners of the station. It was a junction, and two early morning trains, one up and one down, passed between four and five o'clock. Both parties accordingly had some time to wait. Mr. Burton, skulking behind anything that would shelter him, made out, to his great amazement, that the other traveller waiting about was his friend Golden, accompanied by a cloaked and veiled woman. The fugitive grinned in ghastly satisfaction when he saw it. He had no desire just then to encounter Golden, and in such companionship he was safe. It was a lovely morning, fresh and soft, cooler than July usually is, and the pair on the platform walked about in the sun, basking in it. He watched them from behind a line of empty carriages. The woman, whoever she was, clung close to her companion, holding his arm clasped with both her hands; while Golden bent over her, with his face close to her veil. "I wonder who she is? I wonder what they are doing here at this hour? I wonder if he has been to Dura? And, by Jove, to think of his going in for that sort of thing, as if he was five-and-twenty!" Mr. Burton said to himself. He was full of curiosity, almost of amazement, and he longed to go and sun himself on that same platform too. But he was a fugitive, and he dared not. How could he tell who might be about, or what Golden's feelings were towards him? They had been very good friends once; but Burton had stood by Golden but feebly at the time of the trial about Rivers's, and Golden had not stood by Burton warmly during the time of difficulty which had culminated in ruin. He watched

them with growing curiosity, with a kind of interest which he could not understand—with—yes, he could not deny it, with a curious wistfulness and envy. He supposed the fellow was happy like that, now? And as for himself, he was not happy—he was cold, weary, anxious, afraid. He had a prison before him, perhaps a felon's sentence—anyhow, at the least, a loud, hoarse roar of English society and the newspapers. If he could but succeed in putting the channel between him and them! and there was that other man, as guilty as himself, perhaps more guilty ("for he had not my temptations," Mr. Burton said to himself. "He had not a position to keep up, an expensive establishment, a family") sunning himself in the full morning light, waiting for his train in the eye of day, not afraid of anybody—nay, probably at the height of pleasure and success, enjoying himself as a young man enjoys himself! When the pair approached a little closer to his hiding-place than they had yet done, Burton, in his haste to get out of the way, slipped his foot, and fell upon the cold iron rails. He rose with a curse in his heart, the poignancy of the contrast was too much for him. Had he but known that his appearance would have confounded his old friend, and set all his plans to naught! Could he but have imagined who it was that clung to Golden's arm!

But he did not. He saw the up-train arrive, and the two get into it. He had meant to go that way himself, feeling London, of all refuges, the most safe; but he had not courage to venture now. He waited for the other train going down into the country. He made a rapid calculation how he could shape his course to the sea, and get off, if not as directly, perhaps more securely. He had found a dark overcoat in the dog-cart, which was a boon to him; he had poor Helen's flask of wine in his pocket. And as he got into the train, and dashed away out of the station and over the silent, sunshiny country, where safety lay, Golden and Golden's companion went out of Mr. Burton's mind. He had a hundred things to think of, and yet a hundred more. Why should he trouble himself about that?

Thus the night disappeared like a mist from the face of the world, and the 7th of July, an ordinary working day like the others, Saturday, the end of a common week, rose up business-like and usual upon a host of toiling folk, to whom the sight of it was sweet for the sake of the resting day that came after it. Old Ann, from Dura Den, drove her cart with the vegetables and the big posy for the sick gentleman, under Stephen's window, and wonder-

ed that it should still be closed, though it was ten o'clock. Susan, very heavy-eyed and pale, was cleansing and whitening her steps, upon which there had been so many footsteps last night.

"Well, Susan, you *are* late," said old Ann.

"Our folks were all at *that* ball last night," said Susan, "keeping a body up, awaiting for 'em till morning light."

"Well, well, young folks must have their diversions. We was fond of 'em ourselves once on a day," said the charitable old woman.

Across the road the blinds were still down in the Rectory. The young people were all asleep; and even the elder people had been overcome with weariness and the excitement through which, more or less, all of them had gone. Before old Ann's cart resumed its progress, however, Stephen's window had been opened, and signs of life began to appear. About eleven Mrs. Drummond came down-stairs. She had slept for an hour, and on waking had felt assured that she must have been dreaming, and that all her vision of the night was a delusion, but her head ached so, and her face was so pale when she looked at herself in the glass, that Helen trembled and asked herself if this was the beginning of a fever. Something must have happened—it could not all be a dream. She knelt down to say her prayers in front of the table, where her picture, her idol, was. And then she saw a paper, placed upright beneath it, as flowers might be put at a shrine. She read it then, for the first time, on her knees. It was the paper that Reginald Burton had written, which she had taken from him in her weariness without being able to read it. Half-a-dozen lines, no more. She did not understand it now. But it was enough, it was final. No one, after this, could throw reproach or scorn upon her Robert's name.

Robert! This night had been like a year, like a lifetime. It had made her forget. Now she knelt there, and everything came back to her. She did not say her prayers; the attitude sometimes is all that the heavy-laden are capable of; of itself that attitude is an appeal to God, such as a child might make who plucked at its mother's dress to attract her notice, and looked up to her, though it could find no words to say. Not a word came to Helen's lips. She knelt and recollected, and thought—her mind was in a whirl, yet it was silent, not even forming a wish. It was as if she held her breath and gazed upon something which had taken place before her, something with which she had no connection. "I have seen the wicked great in power, like a

green bay-tree; and I passed again, and lo! he was not." Was that the story, written in ruin, written in tears? And Robert! Who was he—he who had stretched out his hands to her in the depths of despair, from hell, from across the Atlantic, from—where?

Helen rose up piteously, and that suspense which had been momentarily dispossessed by the urgency of more immediate claims upon her attention, came back again, and tore her heart in twain. Oh, they might think her foolish who did not know! but who else except Robert could have seized her very heart with those two up-stretched hands of Dives, hands that could have drawn her down, had she been there, out of the highest heaven? She could trust no longer, she thought, to the lukewarm interest of friends—to men who did not understand. She must bestir herself to find out. She must find out if she should die.

Thus, with dry, bright eyes, and a fire new-lit in her heart which burned and scorched her, she went down-stairs into the common world. "I will bring your breakfast directly, 'm," said Susan, meeting her in the passage, and Helen went into the old, ghastly drawing-room, the place which had grown so familiar to her, almost dear.

Was it the old drawing-room she had lived in yesterday? or what strange vision was it that came across her of another room, far different, a summer evening as this was a summer morning, a child who cried "Mamma, here is a letter!" Nothing—nothing! only a mere association, one of the tricks fancy plays us. This feverish state, this sudden swimming of the head, and wild question whether she was back in St. Mary's Road, or where she was, arose from the sight of a letter laid awaiting her in the centre of a little round table. It lay as that letter had lain some years ago, in which he took his leave of her—as a hundred letters must have lain since. A common letter, thrown down carelessly, without any meaning. Oh, fool, fool that she was!

CHAPTER XL.

MRS. BURTON was alone in her deserted house. The house was not deserted in the common sense of the word. Up-stairs at this very moment it was buzzing with life and movement; and the young men in the smoking-room—men who had come from town, from their duties and their pleasures, expressly for the ball—were commenting to each other carelessly upon the absence of their host. "Young Burton has been off for six months on a wandering fit, and old

Burton is up to the eyes in business, as usual," Cyril Rivers explained, who was not unfriendly to his entertainers; while the Marchioness, with Lady Florizel in the room of state up-stairs was commenting upon Clara's behaviour, and declaring her intention to leave next morning. "Fortunately, Merewether has not committed himself," the Marchioness was saying. In another room of the house, Mrs. Burton's two aunts, flanked by their two maids, were shaking their heads together in mingled sorrow and anger. "Depend upon it, something will come of all this," Mrs. Everest said, as she put on her night-cap; and Aunt Louisa cried, and exclaimed that when Clara entered on such an extravagant course she always knew that some chastisement must come. "I would shut that child up, and feed her on bread and water," cried the stronger-minded sister; and so said the maids, who thought Miss Clary was bewitched—and with such a man!

While all this was going on, little Mrs. Burton was alone in the ball-room, which was still blazing with lights. She was seated wearily in a big chair at one end. But for her diamonds, which sought the light, and made a blaze of radiance round about her, like the aureole of a saint, she would have been invisible in the great, spacious, empty room. A deserted ball-room has been so often described, that I will not repeat the unnecessary picture. This ball-room, however, had not a dismal aspect; everything was too well managed for that. The flowers, arranged in great brilliant banks of colour, were not fading, but looked as brilliant as ever; the lights shone as brightly. Except for some flowers dropped about from the bouquets of the dancers, some shreds of lace and tulle torn from their dress, it might have been before instead of after the ball. Mrs. Burton was seated at the further end. She sat quite motionless, her hands crossed in her lap, her diamonds reflecting the light. What a night this had been for her! The other parties concerned had each had their share—her husband his ruin, her child her elopement; but this small woman with her hands clasped, with this crowded house to regulate and manage, with her part still to play in the world around her, knew all and had all to bear. She sat thus among the ruins, nothing hid from her, nothing postponed. Through her slight little frame there was a dull throbbing of pain; but her head was clear, and did not lose a jot of all that fate had done, of all it had in store. She did not complain. She had foreseen much; she

had gone forward with her eyes open; she had even said that were her husband to be bankrupt in two days, she would give a ball on the intermediate night. If it was a brag, she had excelled that brag; she had given her greatest ball, and marked her apotheosis, on the very night when he was flying from justice. And no good angel had interfered to soften to her the news of those successive blows. She had herself opened the ball with old Lord Boabdil—the man of highest rank present; and it was when she had resumed her seat after that solemn ceremonial that Golden, whom she hated, approached her, and whispered in her ear the news of her husband's ruin. She had been prepared for the news, but not then, nor at such a moment; nevertheless, she stood up and received the blow without a cry, without a moment's failure of her desperate courage. And everything had gone on. She was always pale, so that there was nothing to betray her so far as that went, and her cares as hostess never relaxed. She went from side to side, dispensing her attentions, looking after everybody's comfort as if she had been a queen, and all the time asking herself had he been taken? was he a prisoner? how much shame should she have to bear? Then, when the slow hours had gone on, and the insupportable din about her seemed as if it must soon come to an end, there arrived that other messenger of woe, poor kind Mrs. Dalton, with tears in her eyes, and a voice which faltered. "The rector has gone after them. Oh, will you let me stay with you? Can I be of any use to you?" Mrs. Dalton had sobbed, attracting, as the other woman—the real sufferer—knew, the attention of those groups about, who had no right to know anything of her private sorrows. "It is not necessary. My father is here, and my aunts. I can have everything done that is wanted," Mrs. Burton replied; and she had turned round to show some one who came to ask her where the basket was with all the ribbons, and flowers, and pretty toys for the cotillion. Through all this she had stood her ground. She had shaken hands with the last of her guests and had seen the visitors to their rooms before she gave in; and even now she was not giving in. Had any one entered the empty room, Mrs. Burton would have proved equal to the occasion; she would have risen to meet them—have talked on any subject with perfect self-command. But fortunately no one came.

Poor old Mr. Baldwin had arrived at Dura only that night. He had heard a great many

disquieting rumours, and he was very unhappy about his son-in-law's position, and about the way in which his daughter took it. Even the fact that she had her settlement scarcely consoled him; for he said to himself that the creditors would "reflect" upon all this extravagance, and that even about the settlement itself a great deal would be said. He had hovered about her all the evening, looking wistfully at her, inviting her confidence; but Mrs. Burton had not said a word to him, even of her daughter's disappearance. She had felt no impulse to do anything about Clary. Whether it was that all her energy was required to bear up against those successive blows, or if her pride shrunk from informing even her own friends, or finally, if she felt it useless, and knew that now no person on earth could compel the self-willed girl to return, it is certain that Mrs. Burton had "taken no steps." Even now she did not think of taking any steps. She allowed her father and her aunts to go to bed without a word. She sat and pondered, and did nothing. Alone in that great blazing deserted room—alone in the house—alone in the world: this was what she felt. Out of doors the birds were singing and the sun shining; but the closed windows admitted only the palest gleam of the daylight. When the servants came to tell her that Mr. Dalton was at the door, asking to see her, she sent him a civil message. "Many thanks; but her father was with her, and could do all she wanted." Then her maid came to ask if Mrs. Burton did not want anything, and was sent away with a wave of her hand. Then the butler came timidly to ask should they shut up? was master to be expected? At that summons Mrs. Burton rose.

"I am tired," she said, putting on her company colour; for Simmons the butler was as important in his way as old Lord Boabdil. "I was glad to rest a little after all the worry. Yes, certainly, shut up, and let everybody go to bed. I do not expect your master to-night."

"If I might make so bold, madam," said Simmons, "Tom the groom have just been in to say as orders was took to the stables to send the dog-cart for master to the north gate, and as he took him up there and drove him to Turley station, and as he gave him this note, and said as it was all right."

"All right!" She repeated the words, looking at him with a ghastly bewilderment which frightened the man. And then she recovered herself, and resumed her former

composure. "That will do, Simmons. Your master had a—journey—to make. I was not aware he would have started so—soon. Have everything shut up as quickly as possible, and let all the servants go to bed."

She went up-stairs, emerging all at once into the full morning sunshine in the hall, which dazzled and appalled her. The light dazzled her eyes, but not her jewels, which woke at its touch, and blazed about her with living, many-coloured radiance. A little rainbow seemed to form round her as she went up-stairs. How her temples throbbed! What a dull aching was in every limb, in every pulse! She went into Clara's room first. She was not a very tender mother, and never had been; yet almost every night for seventeen years she had gone into that room before retiring to her own. Clara's maid was seated, fast asleep, before a table on which a candle was burning pitifully in the full daylight. The room looked trim and still as a room does which has not been occupied in that early brightness. The maid woke with a shiver as Mrs. Burton entered.

"Oh, Miss Clara, I beg your pardon," she said.

"It is no matter. My daughter will not want you to-night. Go to bed, Jane," said Mrs. Burton. "And you can tell Barnes to go to bed. Neither of you will be wanted. Go at once."

When she was left alone, she cast a glance round to see if there was any letter. There was a little three-cornered note fastened on the pincushion. She took that into her hand along with her husband's note, which she held there, but did not attempt to read either. With a quick eye she noted that Clara's jewel-case and all the presents which had been showered upon her that morning—her eighteenth birthday—had gone. A faint, mechanical smile came upon her face, and then she locked the door, and went to her own room.

She sat down there again to think, with the diamonds still upon her and all her ornaments, and the two letters in her hand. Why should she read them? She knew exactly what they would be. The one she did open after a long pause was Clary's. The other—had she any interest in it? It gave her a sensation of disgust rather. She tossed it on the table. Clary's note was very short. It ran thus:—

"DEAR MAMMA,—Feeling sure you never would consent, and as we both know we could

not live without each other, I have made up my mind to leave you. I shall be Mrs. Golden when you get this, for he has prepared everything. We start immediately for the Lakes, and I will write you from there. Of course it would have been nicer to have been Lady Somebody; but then I never saw any one who was half so nice as he is; and he hopes, and so do I, that you will soon make up your mind to it, and forgive us.

"Your affectionate

"CLARY.

"He bids me say it is to be at St. James's, Piccadilly, and that if you inquire, you will find everything quite right."

Mrs. Burton tossed this from her too on to the same table where the father's letter lay unopened. The scorn with which they filled her stopped for a moment the movements of that wonderful machine of thinking which nothing had yet arrested. It was "human nature" *pur et simple*. Clara had taken her jewels, had made sure it was "all right" about the wedding; and the father had sent the same message—"all right." All right! A smile flitted across the pale, almost stern, little face of the woman who was left to bear all this, and to bear it alone. Most other women would have made some passionate attempt to do something—to pursue the one or the other—to go to their succor. Mrs. Burton had no such impulse. She was like a soldier who has fought to the last gasp; she stood still upon her span of soil, her sword broken, her banner taken from her; nothing to fight for any longer, yet still, with the instinct of battle, holding out, and standing firm. So long as there was any excuse for keeping up the conflict, she would have borne every blow like a stoic; but what she could not bear was the thought of giving in; and the hour for giving in had come.

Must it be told? Must she acknowledge before the world that all had been in vain? that her husband was a fugitive, her daughter the victim of a scoundrel, her family for ever crushed down and trampled in the dust? To everything else she could have wound up her high courage. This was the only thing that was really hard for her, and this was what she had to do. How much, she wondered, would she have to suffer? Probably Mr. Burton would be taken, tried, share the fate which various men whose names she knew had already borne. Should she have to go to him? to visit him in his prison? to read her own name in the papers—"Mrs. Burton spent an hour with the prisoner,"

"His wife was present?" She clasped her small, thin hands together. For a long time she had wondered whether when it came she would feel it. She could have answered her own question now. Ruin, shame, public comment, sudden descent from her high estate, humiliation, sympathy, even pity—all these were before her, and it would have been hard for her to say which was the worst.

The young men roused her with their voices as they came up-stairs. It was not worth while going to bed, she heard one say; a bath, and then a long walk somewhere before breakfast was the only thing possible. This called her attention to the clock striking on the mantelpiece. Six o'clock! No longer night, but day! She rose, and took off her jewels and her evening dress. It troubled and tired, and irritated her to do all this for herself; but she succeeded at last. A nightly vigil, and even all the emotion through which she had passed did not make the same difference to her colourless countenance which it would have done to a more blooming woman. When she knocked at her father's door, and went in to his bedside to speak to him, he thought her looking very much as usual. He thought he must have overslept himself, which was likely enough, considering how late he had been last night, and that she had come to call him and have a chat with him before all her fine people came down to breakfast. It was kind of Clara. It showed, what he had sometimes doubted, that she was still capable of recollecting that she was his child.

"I have come to tell you of some things that have happened," she said, sitting down in the big chair by the bed, "and to ask your advice and help. Some strange things have happened to-night. In the first place, papa, you were a true prophet. Mr. Burton has been obliged to go away."

"To go away?"

"Yes, to escape, to fly—whatever you call it. He is—ruined. I suppose he must be worse than ruined," she added quietly; "for—I hear—the police——"

"Oh, Clara! Oh, my poor, poor child!"

"Don't be sorry for me, papa. Let us look at it calmly. I am not one to cry, you know, and get over it in that way. So far as I have heard yet, he has got off: he reached Turley station this morning, I suppose in time for the train. Most likely he has money, as he has not asked for any, and he may get safely off. Stop, papa; that is not all I have to tell you. There is something more."

"Clara, my own poor girl! there can be nothing so bad."

"Some people would think it worse," she said. "Papa, don't say any more than you can help. Clara has—eloped. She has gone off with Mr. Golden, whom you all forgave, whom I hated, who was—her father's friend."

The old man gave a great cry. Clary was his grandchild, whom he adored. He loved her with that fond, caressing, irresponsible love which is sometimes sweeter than even a parent's love for his own child. It was for others to find fault with, to correct, her; the grandfather had nothing to do but admire, and pet, and praise. "Clary!" it was but the other day that he told her stories as she sat on his knee!

"Yes, Clary. Here is her note, and here is—Mr. Burton's. They are both gone. All this has happened since last night."

"Clara, what o'clock is it now?"

"Half-past six," she said, mechanically taking out her watch, "and fortunately nobody will be stirring for some time at least. Papa, what are you going to do?"

"I am going to get up," he said. "Clara, there is still time. If I can get up to town by the first train, I may be in time to stop it yet."

"To stop—what?"

"The marriage, child, the marriage! Clary's destruction! Go away, my dear, and let me get up."

"It would be of no use," she said. "Papa, when Clary has made up her mind, nothing that we can say would stop her. You might do it by law, perhaps; but she will never come home again—never hear reason. I know her better. There were a great many things I wanted to ask about—"

"Leave me just now, for heaven's sake, Clara! I must try, at least, to save the child."

She rose without another word, and went away. A smile once more stole upon her face, and stayed there, rigid and fixed. He might have been of a little help to herself; but he thought of Clary first—Clary, who was obstinate, and whom nothing could move—who was coaxing and winning to those who loved her, and would persuade the old man to anything. Well, Mrs. Burton said to herself, she had hoped for his help for a moment; but now it was clear that she must do everything for herself.

She went down-stairs, and took down a cloak which hung in the hall, and wrapping it about her, stepped out into the fresh air.

That, at least, might help her, though nothing else would. She walked down to the avenue, to the skirt of the woods. Like a cordial the soft air breathed about her, and gave her a certain strength. She was not a woman who cared about the meaner delights of wealth; all these she would have given up without a pang. But to exchange this large, free, lofty life which she had been leading for the restrained and limited existence of her father's house—to be no longer entire mistress of her own actions, but to be bound by her father's antiquated notions, by what Aunt Everest and Aunt Louisa thought proper—that would be hard to bend her mind to. To give up Dura for Clapham! Even that she could do stoically, and no one would ever be the wiser. But to bear all the shame, all the comments, a husband in prison, a story of romance of real life, ruin of the father, elopement of the daughter, in the newspapers! Mrs. Burton gave no outward sign of the struggle that went on within her, but she clasped her little thin white hands together, and she recognised at once, wholly and clearly, without any self-deception, what she would have to bear.

She waited there till her father came up to her on his way to the station. He stopped and told her he would come back as soon as he could.

"Most likely I will take Clary to Clapham first," he said. "Better than here, don't you think? She might be frightened to face you after her folly. My dear, take a little courage, if you can. The innocent child has given us all the clue that is necessary—St. James's, Piccadilly. No marriage could take place before eight o'clock, and I shall reach there soon after—in time to prevent that, at least. I will take her to Clapham, and then, my dear, I will come straight back to you."

"Very well, papa," she said.

In her heart she wondered at his simplicity, at the folly of his hopes; but what was the use of saying anything? If it pleased him to do this, if this was what he thought best, why, let him do it. Let every one act as it seemed good in his own eyes.

"And by-the-bye, Clara, one thing more," he said—"Ned's address. Where is he now? I must telegraph at once for him."

Then some faint semblance of the tigress guarding her young appeared in Mrs. Burton.

"Ned! Why should Ned be brought home? Why should he be involved in trouble he has nothing to do with? He is out

of it; he, at least, is safe. No, papa; I will not have him brought back."

"Clara, you are mad, you are incomprehensible!" cried her father. "Give me the boy's address."

"I will not," she answered, looking at him.

The woman had come to light in her at last—the woman and something of the mother. As a daughter she had neglected none of the observances of respect. She had been dutiful, though she had long been an independent agent, and had forgotten the very idea of obedience. But never had she defied her father before. She did it now calmly, as she did everything. She had upheld her family and its importance as long as mortal strength could do it; but now, when that had failed, she would at least defend her boy.

"Clara, you astonish me. I could not have believed it of you," said her father severely.

But he had no time to remonstrate or to command. He had to hurry away for his train. And she stood and looked after him, her breath for the first time quickened with excitement, her resolution bringing a certain colour to her cheek. Ned was safe, and out of all this trouble. It was the only gleam of comfort in her clouded sky. He who should bring her boy back to undergo all this shame and suffering was her enemy, though it were done on the specious pretence of serving her. Bringing her son, back to support and help her: the man who did it would be her enemy. She could do without the help and support. She was ready to bear anything, since it must be borne. What relief could it afford her to know that another suffered too, and that other her son? She went back to the house with quickened steps under the sway of the thought, that Ned, at least, was safe, and kept out of it. She was not the kind of woman who would complain of bearing anything alone.

Breakfast was a very late and straggling meal that day at Dura; but Mrs. Burton was the first at the table—before even the young man who had proposed a bath and a walk instead of sleep. The breakfast was as sumptuous, as well served, as usual, and there were the same number of servants about, the dogs, as usual, on the lawn, the man with the post-bags, as usual, visible coming up the avenue. The eye would have seen no indication of any change. But Mrs. Burton made a calm little speech to every new group, which had the most curiously disconcerting effect upon her guests. She

said to them that family circumstances compelled her to make preparations at once for leaving Dura; that some things had happened which she need not tell them of—family events—which had changed all her arrangements. She hoped, under these circumstances, they would pardon, if she said plainly—

"Oh, yes, certainly. Not another word," the visitors cried, dismayed. They all gazed at each other, and whispered over their tea-cups when her back was turned. They heard her say the same thing to one party after another—even to the Marchioness herself, who had come down fully primed, meaning to overwhelm Mrs. Burton with a theatrical leavetaking.

"Why, why, why!" she cried in her wrath, "you mean that you want to—get rid of us, Mrs. Burton!" and her hair stood on end upon her noble head.

"I am afraid, without making any mystery of it, that is what I do mean, Lady Upshire," said the woman who was only the wife of a rich City man—a *parvenue*, one of the *nouveaux riches*—fixing her blue eyes calmly upon her splendid guest.

"What pluck she has!" the young men said to themselves. They almost cheered her for her dauntless front. And they were all gone by two o'clock—marchioness and maidservant, guardsman and public servant—every visitor, gentle and simple. They disappeared as if by magic. What questions they asked each other, what speculations they entertained among themselves, Mrs. Burton neither knew nor cared. The first thing was to be free of them, and when the afternoon came, she was alone with the startled servants and her two aunts, to whom as yet she had given no explanations, and whose private opinion, stated a hundred times that morning, was, that at last beyond all controversy, Clara must be mad.

CHAPTER XLI.

MR. BALDWIN came back to Dura in the afternoon, worn out and disappointed—foiled by the simple fact, which had never occurred to the old man as possible, that Clara—his innocent Clara—had wittingly or unwittingly given a false indication, and that St. James's, Piccadilly, knew nothing of any such marriage. Mr. Baldwin drove to all the hotels, to all the churches, he could think of, from St. James's, Camberwell, to St. James's, Kentish Town, but in vain. Just when it was too late to follow them further, he discovered

an anonymous little chapel which he must have passed a dozen times in his journeys, where the ceremony had actually taken place. Charles Golden to Clara Burton. Then he had gone to the Northern Railway Station, and discovered that they had left by the eleven o'clock train. All he had done had been to verify their movements. The poor old man aged ten years during this running to and fro. He went back to his daughter worn out and miserable. Little Clara, the pride of the family, with all her beauty, her youth, and the possibilities that lay before her! "Now I know that we may go too far in carrying out the precepts of Christianity," he groaned, when his sympathetic sisters came to console him. "We thought he had repented, and we took him back to our hearts." In this, however, poor Mr. Baldwin deceived himself. Golden had been received back into their hearts, not because he had repented, but because the scandal against him had died into oblivion, and because in their souls even the honest men admired the consummate cleverness of the rogue. And in this point, at least, Mr. Golden had not been mercenary; he had actually fallen in love with Clara Burton, knowing the desperate state of her father's affairs—affairs which were so desperate, when he was called on to help in regulating them, that he had been "obliged to decline" the task. Golden had a little Sybarite "place" of his own on the shores of the Mediterranean. So many scraps of money had adhered to his fingers in his various commercial adventures, though these adventures were always unfortunate, that he could afford himself that crowning luxury of a beautiful wife; and then Mr. Baldwin was a rich man and a doating grandfather, who after a while would be sure to forgive.

As for Mrs. Burton, she had expected her father's failure, and was not surprised or disappointed. She had given her daughter up, not with any revengeful or vindictive intention, but simply as a matter of fact. "Oh, don't curse her, Clara!" Aunt Louisa sobbed in the midst of her tears. And then indeed Mrs. Burton was surprised. "Curse her! I have no intention of cursing her," she said. Clara had taken her own way; she had pleased herself. What she had done was quite easily to be accounted for; it was human nature. Mrs. Burton was not subject to passions herself, but she recognised them as a motive-power; and though perhaps in her inmost heart there was a sense of shame that *her* child should be violently moved by

those lowest, almost brutal, forces (for so she deemed them), yet her intelligence understood and allowed the possibility. Clara had acted according to her nature; that was all that was to be said. She had laid an additional burden upon her family—or rather upon her mother, the only one of the family left to bear it; but then it was not natural to Clara to take account of what other people might have to bear. Thus Mrs. Burton accepted it, making no complaint. If it gave her any additional individual pang for itself, and not merely as part of the whole, she at least said little about it, and made no individual complaint.

But there came a moment when actual feeling, emotion not to be disguised, broke forth in this self-possessed woman. She had decided to remain at Dura till further news, and until her husband's affairs could be fully examined into, and though her aunts went home, her father remained with her. Two long days passed over without news. On the third, Tuesday, Mr. Baldwin went to town to make what inquiries were possible. As yet there had been but vague hints in the newspapers—rumours of changes affecting "a well-known name in the City"—and the old man had hesitated to show himself, to ask any questions which might, as he said, "precipitate matters." "While we are in ignorance, quiet is best," he had said; but when the third day arrived, though Mrs. Burton still bore the suspense like a stoic, Mr. Baldwin could not bear it any longer. When he was gone, she showed no signs of impatience; she went about her business as usual, and she had a great deal to do. She had begun at once to wind up the accounts of the house, to arrange with her servants, to whom she was a just and not ungenerous mistress, when they should go, and what would be done to find them places. But when the languid afternoon came, her energy flagged a little. She did not allow, even to herself, that she was anxious. She went into the great drawing-room, and sat down near a window from which she could see the avenue. Perhaps for the first time, the impulse came into her mind to prefer a smaller room, to take refuge somewhere else than in this waste of damask and gilding; but if such was the case, she restrained and condemned the thought. She was herself so small, almost invisible, in the great silent place, full of those mirrors which reflected nothing, those chairs where no one sat. No marble statue with a finger on its lip was ever so complete an embodiment of silence as she, seated there all alone, motion-



"SHE DID NOT EMBRACE HIM, BUT CLUTCHED AT HIS ARM."—(See page 206.)

less, looking out upon the road. It might have been hours before any one came. A summer afternoon, slow, languid, endless, one vast blank of drowsy calm and blazing sunshine, the wind too listless to blow, the leaves too heavy to wave, everything still, even the birds. But at last, at last some one came—not Mr. Baldwin's slow, heavy old steps, but rapid young ones, light and impatient. She gazed at the speck as it gradually approached, and became recognisable. Then her heart gave a great unexpected, painful throb. Ned! Her last little gleam of satisfaction, her last comfort, then, was not to be. He was not out of it, safe, as she had hoped, but here to bear all the brunt, to share all the shame. She tried to get up, to go and meet him, but sank back, faint and incapable, in her chair, trembling, sick to the heart, overwhelmed for the first time.

He came in, bringing a gust of fresh air (it seemed) with him. He was dusty, and pale, and eager.

"Mother!" he cried, as he came up to her.

She held up her hand with a gesture which was almost passionate, repelling him.

"Oh, Ned, Ned! why have you come here?"

"Don't you want me, mamma?"

He kissed her as he spoke, and put his arm round her. If she had been another kind of woman, he would have sobbed on her breast, for the lad's heart was very sore.

"No, I do not want you," she said. "I thought you were safe. I thought you were out of it all. I was ready to bear anything—it cannot hurt me—any scorn. But you, a boy, a lad, with all your life to come! Oh, Ned, Ned, why have you come here?" She had never done it before in all her life. She did not embrace him, but clutched at his arm with her two hands, and shed passionate, hot tears. "I do not want you! I do not want you!" she cried, and clung to him. "I wish you were at the end of the world!"

"Oh, mother!" cried the boy.

He was fond of her, though perhaps she had never done anything to deserve it. And she—loved him. Yes. All at once she found it out, with a mother's passion. Loved him so that she would have been glad never to see him again; glad to be cut in pieces for him; glad to suffer shame, and pain, and misery, and ruin alone, that he might be out of it. This, which she had scarcely suspected, she found out at last.

But when this moment was over, and the

fact that he had come was indisputable, and had to be made the best of, Mrs. Burton recovered her usual calm. She was ashamed of herself for having "broken down." She said it was fatigue and want of sleep which had made her weak, and then she told him all the circumstances dispassionately, as was natural to her. He himself had been summoned by a telegram from Golden. He had been at Dresden when he received it, and he had travelled night and day. But why from Golden, he said, a man whom he hated. "Your mother wants you here. There has been a great smash, and your presence is indispensable," was what the telegram had said. But I will not attempt to describe how the little, pale, dispassionate mother told the tale, nor how the young son, full of youthful passion, indignation, rage, and grief, heard of his family's downfall, and the ruin of all its prospects and hopes.

When Mr. Baldwin came back, he brought news still more overwhelming. The fact which had made further concealment impossible, and had driven Burton to flight, was the winding-up of a trust account for which he had been responsible. The property had been invested by him, and he had paid the interest regularly; but it was found that not a penny of the original capital remained; he had appropriated all. When it was known that he had disappeared, other inquiries had been at once set on foot, but kept carefully out of the papers, lest his escape might be facilitated; and then such disclosures were made as Mr. Baldwin could only repeat bit by bit, as his strength permitted. The old man cried like a child; he was utterly broken down. It had even come out about Rivers's, he said. One of the missing books, which poor Drummond had been accused of destroying, had been found in a private safe, along with damning accounts, which the unhappy man had not been able to destroy or conceal, so quickly did his fate overtake him. The unhappy man! Both Mr. Baldwin and Mrs. Burton remembered the time when Robert Drummond had been thus described—when all the newspapers had preached little sermons about him, with many a repetition of this title—articles which Burton had read, and shaken his head over, and declared were good as sermons, as warning the ignorant. This flashed upon Mrs. Burton's mind, and it came more dimly to her father. Fortunately, Ned's misery was not complicated by such recollections; he had enough without that.

"But the general impression is that he has escaped," said Mr. Baldwin; and he gave

them the vague account which had been given to him of the two futile detectives, who had watched the fugitive into a house, and kept in front of it, putting the inhabitants on their guard, while he was smuggled out by a side-door. No doubt he had escaped. And it was known that he had money; for he had drawn a large sum out of the bank the day before.

"I am glad you have come back, Ned," the grandfather added. "It is you who ought to manage all this, and not your mother. Of course she has her settlement, which nobody can touch. And I think now, my dear, that you should leave Dura, and come with me to Clapham. You will have your aunts' society to make up a little, and it will be more convenient for Ned."

Mrs. Burton looked at her son almost wistfully.

"Ned, is there any sacrifice I can make that will induce you to go away?"

"None, mother," he said, "none. I will do anything else that you ask me. But here I must have a will of my own. I cannot go away."

"Go away!" said Mr. Baldwin. "I don't know how he has got here; for your mother would not let me send for you, Ned; but of course your place is here. It will be very painful—very painful," said the old man. "But you have your settlement, Clara; and we must hope everything will turn out for the best."

"My mother will give up her settlement, sir, of course," said Ned. "After what has happened, she could not—it would be impossible—What! you don't see it? Must not those suffer who have done the wrong?"

"Ned, you are a fool," said Mr. Baldwin, "a hot-headed young fool. I see your sense now, Clara. That scoundrel, Golden, has sent for him only to increase our vexation. Give up her settlement! Then pray how is she to live?"

"With me," said Ned, rising up, and standing behind his mother's chair. He would have taken her hand to sustain him, if he could; but she did not give him her hand. He put his on the back of her chair. That, at least, was something to give him strength.

"With you!" Mr. Baldwin was moved by this absurdity to something of his former vigour. "It would be satisfactory, indeed, trusting her to you. I will have no Quixotical nonsense brought into this. That is my affair. I am the proper person to look after my daughter's settlement. It is the only comfort in a bad business. Don't let me hear any more of such childish folly."

"It is not folly," said Ned firmly, though his voice trembled. "I am sure my mother feels like me. We have no right to keep anything while my father has been spending other people's money; or if we have a right in law——"

Mrs. Burton put up her hand to stop him. It was the first time in her life that she had allowed herself to be discussed, what she should or would do, without taking any share in it. The fact was, the question was a new one—the problem quite strange to her. She had considered it as certain up to this moment that her settlement belonged to her absolutely, and that her husband's conduct one way or other could have no effect upon her undoubted right. The problem was altogether new. She put up her hand to interrupt the discussion.

"I have not thought of this," she said. "Ned, say no more. I want time to think. I will tell you to-morrow what I will do."

Against this decision there was not a word to say. The old man and the boy gave up their discussion as suddenly as they had begun it. Let them argue as they would, it was she who must settle the question; and just then the great bell rang—the bell which regulated the clock in the village, and warned all the countryside when the great people at the great house were going to dine. The ears which were accustomed to it scarcely noted the sound; but Ned, to whom it had become a novelty, and as great a mockery as a novelty, started violently, put up his hands to his ears, and rushed out into the hall, where Simmons stood in all the splendour of his evening dress.

"Stop that infernal noise!" cried poor Ned, in a sudden outburst of rage and humiliation. He felt tempted to knock down the solemn spy before him, who already, he saw, had noted his dusty dress, his agitated face.

"Happy to see you home, sir," said Simmons. "Did you speak, sir? Is there anything as I can do for you?"

"The bell is not to be rung any more," said Ned, walking gloomily off to his room.

It was the first sign to the general world that the grandeur of Dura had come to an end.

A mournful dinner followed, carefully cooked, carefully served, an assiduous, silent servant behind each chair, and eaten as with ashes, and bitterness, and tears, a few faint remarks now and then, a feeble attempt, "for the sake of the servants," to look as if nothing was the matter. It was Mr. Baldwin chiefly, a man who never could make up his

mind that all was over, who made these attempts. Mrs. Burton, for her part, was above all pretences. Her long stand against approaching ruin was over; she had laid down her arms, and she no longer cared who knew it. And as for Ned, he was too miserable, too heart-broken, to look anything but overwhelmed with sorrow and shame, as he was.

In the evening he strolled out, feeling the air of the house insupportable. His mother had gone to her room with her new problem which she had to solve, and Mr. Baldwin was tired, and fretful, and anxious to get to bed early, feeling that there was a certain virtue in that fact of going early to bed which might redeem the unusually disturbed, excited life he was leading—a life in which he had been fatally entangled with ruins, and elopements, and sitting up half the night. Ned, who had no mind for sleep, and no power of thinking which could have done him any good in the circumstances, went out disconsolately, saying to himself that a stroll in the woods might do him good. But when he had reached the top of the avenue, where the path diverged into the woods, some "spirit in his feet" led him straight on. Why, he asked himself, should he go to the village? why should he go to the Gatehouse? Yes, that was where he wanted to go—where his foolish heart had gone before him, courting slight and scorn. Why should he go? If she had sent him away then with contumely, how much more now? Then if she had but looked upon him kindly, he had thought he had something to offer her worthy her acceptance. Now he had nothing, and less than nothing—an empty purse and a dishonoured name. Ned slouched his hat over his eyes. He would go and look at the house, look at her window. If he might see her face again, that would be more than he hoped for. Norah could be nothing—nothing to him now.

So saying, he wandered down the leafy, shadowy way. The sun had set, the grey of the evening had come on. The moon was past the full, and rose late. It was one of those soft, tranquil, mournful summer evenings which fill the heart with wistfulness and longings. The water came unbidden into poor Ned's eyes. Oh, what ruin, what destruction had overwhelmed him and his since last he walked down that path! Then everything that life could offer to make up for the want of Norah (though that was nothing) lay within his grasp. Now, though Norah was clearly lost, everything else was lost with her. He saw no hope before him; his very heart

was crushed. A beggar, and more than a beggar; a man who did not know how to dig or how to work; the son of a father who was disgraced. These were miserable thoughts to pour through the mind of a young man of twenty-one. There have been others who have had as much to bear; but they, perhaps, had no Norah to complicate and increase the burden. As he drew near the Gatehouse, his heart began to beat louder. Possibly she would not care to speak to him at all, he thought. How quickly she had dismissed him last time, when he had no stains upon him, as he had now!

He drew his hat still more over his brows. He walked quickly past the Gatehouse. The windows were all open, and Stephen Haldane sat within, in an interior faintly lighted up by the candles which Miss Jane had just set down upon the table.

"Don't shut my window yet," he heard the invalid say. "My poor window! My chief pleasure!"

It was strange to Ned to hear those words, which seemed to let him into the very secret of the sick man's life.

"And a capital window it has been too," said Miss Jane briskly, thinking of the book, and the money it had brought in.

Ned slackened his steps when he had passed. There had been something at one of the windows on the other side—something, a shadow, a passing gleam, as of a pale face pillowed upon two arms. The poor boy turned, and went back this time more slowly. Yes, surely there was a face at the window. The arms were withdrawn now. There was no light inside to reveal who it was. Only a something—a pale little face looking out.

Back again—just once more, once more—to have a last look. He would never see her again, most likely. As far away as if she were a star in heaven would she be henceforward. He would pass a little more slowly this time; there was no one about to see him. The road was quieter than usual; no one in sight; and with his hat so over his eyes, who would recognise him? He went very softly, lingering over every step. She was still there, looking out, and in the dark with no one near her! Oh, Norah! If she could but know how his heart was pulling at him, forcing him towards that door!

He thought he heard some sound in the silence as of an exclamation, and the face disappeared from the window. A moment after the door opened suddenly, and a little figure rushed out.

"Ned!" it said, "Ned! Is it possible?

Can it be you? And, oh, what do you mean walking about outside like that, as if you knew nobody here?"

"Oh, Norah! I did not know if I might come," said abject Ned.

"Of course you may come. Why shouldn't you come? Oh, Ned, I was so lonely! I am so glad to see you! I did not know what to do with myself. Susan would not bring in the lamp, and I am so afraid of this room when it is dark!"

"How you once frightened me about it!" he said, as he went in with her.

His heart felt so much lighter, he could not tell how. Insensibly his spirits rose, and with a sense of infinite refreshment, and even of having escaped from something, he went back to the recollections of his youth. Such an innocent, simple recollection, belonging to the time when all was pleasure, when there was no pain.

"Did I? But never mind. Oh, Ned! poor Ned! have they brought you here because of all this trouble? I have so much to say to you. My heart is breaking for you. Oh, you poor, poor, dear boy!"

This was not how he had expected to be spoken to. He could scarcely see her face, it was so dark, what with the curtains at the windows and the shadows of the lime-leaves; but she had put her hand into his to comfort him. He did not know what to say; his heart was torn in twain, between misery and joy. It was so hard to let any gleam of light into that desperate darkness; and yet it was so hard to keep his heart from dancing at the sound of her soft, tender voice.

"Norah," he said, "Oh, Norah! it will not be so very bad if you are sorry for me. You would not speak to me last time. I thought I might, perhaps, never see you again."

"Oh, Ned! I was only a child. How foolish I was! I hoped you would look back; but you never looked back; and we who have been brought up together, who have always been—fond of each other!"

"Do you? do you? Oh, Norah! not just because you are sorry? Do you care—a little for me? Speak the truth."

"Ned, Ned, I care for you more than anybody—except mamma."

There was a little silence after this. They were like two children in the simplicity of their youth, their hearts beat together, their burdens—and both the young shoulders were weighed down by premature burdens—were somehow lightened, they could not tell how.

After a while, Norah, nestling like a little

bird in the dark, said softly, "Do you mind sitting without the lamp?" and Ned answered, "No." They sat down together, holding each other's hands; they were not afraid of the dark. They poured out their hearts to each other. All his sorrows, all his difficulties, Ned poured into Norah's sympathetic bosom; and she cried, and he consoled her; and she patted his hand or his sleeve, and said, "Poor boy! Poor, dear Ned!" It was not much. She had no advice to give him, not many words of wisdom; but what she did say was as healing as the leaves of that tree in Paradise. Her touch stanchd all his wounds.

"I have something to tell you too," she said, trembling a little, when all his tale had been told. "Ned, you have heard of poor papa, my father, who died before we came here. Oh, Ned! listen. Stoop down, and let me whisper. Ned, he did not die——"

"Norah!"

"Hush. Yes; it is quite true. Oh, don't be frightened. I can't help being frightened staying here alone. Mamma went to him yesterday. Oh, Ned! after seven years! Was there ever anything so strange?"

"Poor Mrs. Drummond!" said Ned. "Oh, Norah, thank God! My father has not done so much harm as I thought. Are you all alone, my own darling? I suppose she was so happy to go."

He said this with a strange accent of blame in his voice. "For her own selfish happiness she could leave Norah—my Norah—all alone!" That was what the young man, in his haste, thought.

"I think she was frightened too," said Norah, under her breath. "She did not understand it. It is as if he had been really dead, and come alive again. Mamma did not say anything; but I know she was frightened too."

"Norah, most likely he hates us. If he should try to keep you from me——"

"Oh, Ned, do you mean that this means anything? Do you think it is right? We are all in such trouble, not knowing what may happen. Do you mean," said Norah, faltering and trembling, "do you mean that this means—? Is it—being engaged?"

"Doesn't it, dear? Oh, Norah, what could it mean else? You would never have the heart to cast me off now?"

"Cast you off! Oh, no, Ned! Oh, never, Ned! But then that is different. We are so dreadfully young. We have no money. We are in such trouble. Oh! do you think it is right?"

"It can't be wrong to be fond of each other, Norah; and you said you were—a little."

"Yes; oh, yes! Oh, Ned! do be satisfied. Isn't it enough for us to care for each other—to be the very best, dearest friends?"

"It is not enough for me," he said, turning his head aside, and speaking sternly in the dark.

"Isn't it, Ned?" said Norah timidly. "Ned, I wish I could see your face. You are not angry? You poor, dear boy! Oh! you don't think I could have the heart to cross you? And you in such trouble. Ned, what must we do?"

"You must promise me, Norah, on your

true and faithful word, that you will marry me as soon as we can, whatever anybody may say."

Norah in her alarm seized at the saving clause which staved off all immediate terms.

"When we *can*, Ned?"

"Yes, my own darling. You promise? I shall not mind what happens if I have your promise—your faithful promise, Norah."

"I promise you faithfully, Ned—faithfully, dear Ned!—when we can—if it should not be for years."

"But it shall be!" he cried; and then they kissed each other, poor children! and Norah was sitting by herself crying when Susan brought in the lamp.



"THEY SAT DOWN TOGETHER, HOLDING EACH OTHER'S HANDS."—(See page 209.)

PART XII.

CHAPTER XLII.

MRS. BURTON took her new problem away with her into the quiet of her room. It was a question which had never occurred to her before. Some few first principles even an inquiring mind like hers must take for granted, and this had been one of them. She had no love for money, and no contempt for it—it was a mere commonplace necessity, not a thing to be discussed; and though she had a high natural sense of honour and honesty, in her own person, it had not occurred to her to consider that in such a matter she had anything to do but to accept the arrangement which was according to law and common custom, an arrangement which, of course, had been made (theoretically) in view of a calamity such as had just happened. It was the intention of her settlement, and of all settlements, she said to herself, to secure a woman against the chances of her husband's ruin. She, in most cases, was entirely irresponsible for that ruin. She had nothing to do with it, and was unable to prevent it. She had married with the belief that she herself and her children would be provided for, and the first duty of her friends was to make sure that it should be so. Up to this point there was no flaw in the argument. Mrs. Burton knew that she had brought her husband a good fortune; and her future had been secured as an equivalent. It was like buying a commission—it was like making an investment. She had put in so much money she had a right to secure to herself absolutely the power of taking it out again, or recovering what had been hers. Mr. Burton had not secured his liabilities with her knowledge and consent; he had never consulted her on the matter. He had never said or even hinted to her that her expenditure was too great, that he could not afford it. True it was possible that fastidious persons might blame her for proceeding so long on her splendid course, after hints and rumors had reached her about her husband's position; but these were nothing more than rumors. She had no sort of official information, nothing really to justify her in making a sudden change in her household, which probably would have affected Mr. Burton's credit more than her extravagance. She was in no way responsible. She had even protested against the re-introduction of Golden

into his affairs. She would not blame herself for anything she had done; she had always been ready to hear, always willing to give him her advice, to second him in any scheme he propounded to her. She put herself at the bar, and produced all the evidence she knew of, on both sides of the question, and acquitted herself. The money she would have saved by economy was not worth considering in the magnitude of Mr. Burton's affairs. She had done nothing which she could feel had made her his accomplice in what he had done.

And she had no right to balk her father in his care for her—to establish a bad precedent in regard to the security of marriage settlements—to put it in the power of any set of creditors to upbraid some other woman whose view of her duty might be different. She had no right to do it. She had to think not of herself only, but of all the married women who slept serenely in the assurance that, whatever happened, their children's bread was secure. She reflected that such a step would put an end to all security—that no woman would venture to marry, that no father would venture to give his child to a man in business, if this safeguard were broken down. It would be impossible. It would be a blow aimed at the constitution of the country—at the best bulwark of families; it would be an injustice. Of all a commercial man's creditors surely his wife was the one claimant who had most right to come first. Others might be partially involved; she put everything in his hands. Without this safeguard she would not have married him, she would not have been permitted to marry him. Going over the question carefully, Mrs. Burton felt, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that she had right on her side.

She had right on her side, but she had not Ned. This was a very different matter—an argument such as she had scarcely ever taken into consideration before. Mrs. Burton did not disdain the personal argument. She knew that in the confused state of human affairs, in the intricate range of human thoughts, it was often impossible to go upon pure reason, and that personal pleas had to be admitted. But she had never consciously done this before. She was almost scornful of her own weakness now. But she could not help herself. She had to suffer the entrance of this great personal argument, if with a mental pang, yet

without resistance. She loved her son. All that reason could do for her, all the approbation of her own judgment, the sense of right, the feeling that her position was logically inassailable, would not be enough to console her for the illogical, unreasoning disapproval of her boy. For the first time in her life, with a great surprise this certainly seized upon her. Up to this time she had gone her own way, she had satisfied herself that she was right according to her own standard, and she had not cared what any one said or thought. But now all at once, with wonder, almost with shame, she found that she had descended from this high eminence. A whole host of foolish, childish, unreasonable principles of action, inconsequences, and stupidities were suddenly imported into her mental world by this apparition of Ned. Not the most certain sense of right that reasoning creature ever had would neutralize, she felt, that pained and wounding look in her son's eyes. If he disapproved it would be a cold comfort to her that reason was on her side. If this indignant, impatient, foolish young soul protested against her that what she did would not bear comparing with some fantastic visionary standard which he called honour, what would it avail her that by her own just standard of weight and measure she was not found wanting? Thus all Mrs. Burton's principles and habits, her ways of thinking, the long-exercised solitary irresponsible power of her intelligence, which had guided her through life for forty years, were all at once brought to a sudden standstill by the touch, by the breath of that thing called Son, which, she knew not how, had suddenly come in upon her like a giant. This new being paralyzed the fine, delicate, exquisite machinery by which hitherto all her problems had been worked out. She tried to struggle against it, but the struggle was ineffectual. It was the first time she had felt herself, acknowledged herself, to be acting like a fool! What then? She could not help it. Even in the clear, cold daylight of her mind the entrance of this new form, all shadowy, mysterious, wonderful, could not be contested. She threw down her arms once more. She had been beaten terribly, miserably in the battle of her life—she was beaten sweetly, wonderfully, in a way which melted her hardness and made the drained heart beat and tremble strangely within her, in the other world where none hitherto had reigned supreme.

But nothing more was said on the subject for some time. Next morning brought letters, which roused the little party once more into

excitement. There was one from Mr. Burton, informing his wife that he had got safely to France by a way little used, and was now in the small seaport of St. Savan, awaiting letters from his family, and their advice as to what was best. He had not meant to go there, but a chance encounter with Golden at the station had driven him to take the down-train instead of the up-train. He would remain there if he could, he added, until he heard from home; but if any alarm came would hasten across the country to Brest, from whence he could get off to America. Mr. Burton did not say a word of apology or explanation, but he begged to have news "of all," to be told "how people were taking it," and to have the newspapers sent him. He added in a P.S. the following question: "By the way, what could Golden be doing at Turley Station, seven miles from Dura, at four o'clock in the morning? And who could the lady be who was with him? If you know anything on this subject, let me know."

Clara's letter was from Windermere. It was full of effusiveness and enthusiasm, hoping that dearest mamma would forgive them. Papa, Charles had told her, was not likely to be in a position to forgive any one, but would want it himself, which was very dreadful; but was it not beautiful of Charles, and showed how generous and how true he was, that papa's ruin made no difference to his feelings? This reflection, Clara said, made her so happy, that she felt as if she could even forgive papa—for if he had not been so rash and so wicked she never would have known how much her dear Charles loved her. They were coming back to London in a fortnight from this heavenly lake, and would start then on a roundabout journey to Charlie's delightful "place" on the Mediterranean. And, oh! Clara hoped with effusion dearest mamma would see them, and forgive them, and believe that she never had been so happy in her life as when she signed herself dear mamma's ever affectionate Clara Golden. These were the letters that came to the little party at Dura on the morning after Ned's arrival. They were received with very different feelings by the three. Mr. Baldwin, on the whole, was pleased. He was pleased with the "love to grandpapa," with which Clara wound up her letter; and he was glad the child was happy at least. "What is done cannot be undone," he said; "and that is quite true about there being nothing mercenary in it, you know." Mrs. Burton gave a faint smile as she laid the letters down one after another. They were just such letters as she

expected. Had she been alone, perhaps, she would have tossed them from her in scorn, as she had done with their previous notes; but that had been in a moment of strong excitement, when she was not full mistress of herself; and what was the good, Mrs. Burton thought, of quarreling with your own whom you cannot alter; or of expecting sense and good taste where it did not exist? From these two, her husband and her daughter, she did not expect any more.

But poor Ned was utterly cast down by these epistles. He asked himself, as Norah had done when Mr. Rivers left her at the door of the Academy's Exhibition, was this natural? was this the way of the world? and, like Norah, felt his own distress doubled by the horrible thought that to think of your own comfort first and above all, and to be utterly unmoved by the reflection that you have caused untold misery to others, is the natural impulse of humanity. He was so sad, and looked so humbled, that his mother's heart was penetrated in her new enlightenment by a strange perception of how he was feeling. She was not so feeling herself. The sight of selfishness, even on so grand a scale, did not surprise nor shock her; but she felt how he was feeling, which was as strange to her as a new revelation. The family at Dura during these days were like a beleaguered city—they lived encircled in a close round, if not of enemies, yet of observant, watchful spectators, who might become enemies at any moment, who might note even the postmark on their letters, and use that against them. Whenever a step was heard approaching the door, a little thrill went through them. It might be some one coming to announce deeper misfortune still. It might be some one who dared to be insolent, some one who had a right to curse and denounce. The tension of their nerves was terrible; the strain of watchfulness—the pain of standing secretly on the defensive.

"Let us go, let us go, Clara, I cannot stay here any longer; now that we know where to write to them, let us go," cried Mr. Baldwin after the letters had been read and dismissed; and then the old man went out to take a melancholy walk, and ponder what it would be best to do. Should they go back to Clapham? or should he take his poor child away somewhere for "change of air." If ever any one wanted change of air surely Clara inust.

"Ned, come here," said Mrs. Burton, when they were left alone. He went and sat down by her, listless, with his hands in

his pockets. Notwithstanding the joy of last night, the letters, the shame and ruin and misery, had overcome Ned.

"I have been thinking over what you said yesterday about my settlement," said his mother. "Ned, in one way your grandfather was right. It is the equivalent to my fortune. It was the foundation of our family life—without that I should not have been permitted to marry. I should not probably have chosen to marry. To give up that is to make an end of all the securities of life. I speak as arguing the question."

"How can *we* argue the question?" cried Ned. "What have the securities of life mattered to the others, who had no connection with—with my father? He was nothing to them but a man of business. They trusted him, and they have nothing left."

"Yes, Ned; but if one of them had been a secured creditor, as it is called, you would not have expected him to give up his security, in order to place himself on an equal level with the others. The most visionary standard of honour would never demand that."

"We are not secured creditors. We are part of him, sharing his responsibility," cried Ned bitterly, "sharing his shame."

"But we are the first of all his creditors, all the same, in justice; and our debt is secured. Ned, I do not say this is what I am going to do; but I think, according to my judgment, your grandfather is right."

"Then, mother——" He had risen up; his face had grown very pale, his nostril dilated, his eyes shining. She who had never been afraid for anything in her life was afraid of her son—of his indignation, of his wrath. She put out her hand, half appealing, half commanding, to stop him. She caught at him, as it were, before he could say another word.

"Ned, hear me out first! I approve of it as a matter of justice. I think we have no right to set up a new standard to make a rule for other women in my position. There will always be such, I suppose. The settlement itself was simply a precaution against this possible thing—which has happened. But I do not say I mean to act according to my opinion. That is different. I have—thought it over, Ned."

"Mother," he said, melting almost into tears, and taking her hand into his, "mother! you who are so much wiser than I am—you are going to let yourself be guided by me?"

"Yes," she said. "I don't quite make myself out, Ned. I have always taken my

own way. Mine is the right way, the just way, but perhaps yours is the best."

"Mother, mother dear! I am awfully miserable! but I feel as if I could tell you how happy I am, now."

And, without another word of preface, without a pause to hear her out, without even observing the bewildered look as of one stopped in mid-career with which she regarded him, Ned dashed into the story of his own love, of his despair and his joy. She listened to him with her blue eyes dilating, looking out of her pale face like specks out of a winter sky—suddenly stiffened back into a little silent stone-woman. She was bewildered at first and thrown off her balance. And then gradually, slowly, the new impatience and faith that had been born of love died in her; and the old, cold, patient toleration, the faint smile, came back. It was natural. His own affairs, of course, were the closest to him. He thought of his private story first, not of hers. She had never subjected herself to such a shock before, and did not know how hard it was to bear. Well! but what of that? That was her own folly, not any one else's. She had put aside her armour, thrown open her breast, for the first time; and if an arrow, barbed and sharp, was the first thing that came to it, that was but natural—it was her own fault. She sat, therefore, and listened with the faint smile even now stealing about her lips—a smile that was half at herself, half at human nature, thus once more, once again, proving itself. And Ned, who had felt so bitterly the absorption of his father and sister in their own affairs, their indifference to the feelings of others—Ned did the same. He slurred over the sacrifice which his mother, at no small cost, was bending her own will to make, and rewarded her by the story of his own boyish happiness—how Norah had cast him off once, how she loved him now. This was the best, the only return he could make to her. From her own serious, weighty purpose, which involved (she felt) so much, he led her aside to his love-tale, of which, for the moment at least, it was madness to expect that anything could come.

"But you don't say anything?" he said at last, half offended, when he had done, or rather when her failure of response had stopped the fulness of his speech.

"I don't know what I can say," she answered, with a coldness which he felt at once. "This seems scarcely the time—scarcely the moment——"

"Of course," he said hurriedly, "I do not expect nor hope that it can be very soon."

"No one, I should think, would be so mad as to expect that," said his mother; "and these long, aimless engagements, without any visible end——"

"I do not see how my engagement can be thought aimless," he said, growing hot.

"Not in your own mind, I suppose; but, so far as anything like marriage is concerned, considering the state of affairs generally, I do not see much meaning in it," said Mrs. Burton coldly. "Your prospects are not brilliant. It was only last night, for instance, that you proposed to burden yourself with me."

"Mother!"

"It is quite true. In answer to your grandfather's sensible question how I was to live, you answered with you. Did you mean upon some hypothetical engagement, whatever you may happen to get, to support a wife—and me?"

He made no answer. A hot flush of mingled anger and pain came over him; he was sorry somehow; he did not quite see how. He had missed the right way of making his announcement, but still it was not his fault. He could not see how he was to blame.

"You must not be surprised in these circumstances if I cannot make any very warm congratulations," she added. "Make your mind easy, however, Ned. I never intended to be a burden on you; but even without that——"

"What have I done, mother, that you should speak to me so?" he cried. "You were so different just now. It is not for Norah's sake? No one could dislike Norah. What have I done?"

"Nothing," she said; and then, with that faintest smile, "you have acted according to your nature, Ned—like the rest. I have no reason to complain."

Then there was a pause. He was a generous, tender-hearted boy, full of love and sympathy; but he had never so much as imagined, could not imagine, the state of feeling his mother had been in, and accordingly could not understand where he was wrong. Wrong somehow, unknowingly, unintentionally—puzzled, affronted, sore at heart—he went away from her. Was it mere caprice on her part? What was it? So it happened that the boy put his foot upon his mother's very heart; and thus strained all his faculties, anxiously, affectionately, to find out what had made her countenance change, and could not, with all his efforts, discover what it was.

The smile remained on Mrs. Burton's face when she was left alone. He had declined to hear her decision about the settlement. Was it not natural that she should reconsider it now that she found how little interest he took in the matter? But it is easier to let that intruder Son, who disorders reason, into a woman's heart than to turn him out again. She did again another novel thing; she made a compromise. She sent for her father at once, and entered into the matter with him. "I allow that all you say is perfectly just," she said; "but this is, partly, a matter of feeling, papa." She smiled at herself as she said it, but yet did say it, without flinching. "I will keep a portion of my settlement—say half. It is, as you said, the only thing I have to depend on."

"My dear," said poor Mr. Baldwin, "of course you have always me to depend on. You are my only child. What I have must come to you, Clara."

"But I don't want it to come to me, papa."

"No, that I am sure you don't; but what is the use of my money to me, but to make my child and her children comfortable—that is excepting Clara—always excepting what I feel bound to do—what I have always done—in the cause of—God. But, all the same, I cannot approve of any sacrifice of your rights."

"I would rather not say any more about it," she said.

And thus for a moment the discussion terminated. Ned went down to the village again, and was made happy, almost quite happy, by a talk with Norah; and they went over together to the Rectory, and told Mrs. Dalton, as a substitute for the absent mother, and were very wretched and very happy together over their miserable prospects and their rapture of early love. Norah was very sorry he had told his mother so prematurely. "She will think it so heartless of us, Ned, to think of being happy when she must be so miserable. Oh, I would have broken it to her very gently. I would have told her how it happened—by accident—that we did not mean anything. Oh, Ned, boys are always so awkward. You have gone and made her think!"

"If you were to come and tell her, Norah."

"No, indeed. What am I to her? A little upstart thing, thrusting myself in, taking away her son. Oh, Ned, how could you? Go and give her a kiss, and say we never meant it. Say I would never, never think of

such a thing while everybody is in such trouble. Say we are so sorry. Oh, Ned! how can you, you who are only a boy, be half sorry enough?"

With such salutary bringing down Ned went home, and was very humble to his mother and very anxious to win back her confidence—an attempt in which he partly succeeded, for, having once begun to open her heart, she could not altogether close it; and a new necessity, a new want, had developed in her. But he never made his way back entirely into that place which had been his for a moment, and which he had forfeited by his own folly. He never quite brought back the state of mind in which she had considered that matter of the settlement first. Next day Mrs. Burton left Dura with her father, "on a visit," it was said; and Ned went to town, "to see after" his father's affairs. Poor boy! there was not much that he could see after. He worked hard and laboriously, under his grandfather's directions and under the orders of the people who had the winding-up of Mr. Burton's concerns in hand; but he had not experience enough to do much out of his own head. It was in this way that his knowledge of business began.

And poor little Norah, alone in the Gatehouse, went and poured out her heart to Mr. Stephen, who listened to her with a heart which throbbed to every woe of hers. A great woe was hanging over the Haldanes, a trouble which as yet they but dimly foresaw. Burton had ruined them in his prosperity, and now, in his downfall, was about to drag them still lower. Already the estate of Dura was in the market, with its mansion and grounds and woods and farms—and the Gatehouse. They had got to feel that the Gatehouse was their home, and all Stephen's happiness was connected with that window, with the tailor and shoemaker who took their evening walks on the other side of the way, with the rector and his morning discussions, even with old Ann in her market cart. And how was he now to go away and seek another refuge? Heavy were the hearts in the Gatehouse. Norah, when Ned had gone, was overwhelmed by terrors; fears lest her mother should not approve, wondering questions about her unknown father, doubts of Mrs. Burton, fears of Ned and for Ned, came upon her like a host, and made her miserable. And then Mr. Rivers came down, who had already made several attempts to see her, and this time made her wretched by reminding and telling her another

er love tale, to which she could make no reply. But for that incident at the Exhibition, and the pain it had brought about, things might have ended otherwise. Had Cyril Rivers made up his mind in May instead of delaying till July, the chances were that Norah, flattered, pleased, and not unwilling to suppose that she might perhaps love him in time, would have given a very different answer. And then she asked herself in dismay, what would have happened when poor Ned came? So that, on the whole, it was for the best, as people said. The pain and shock of that discovery which she had made when Lady Rivers drew her son away, and he went, had been for the best—though it would be hard to believe that Cyril thought so, as he went back mortified to town, feeling that it had cost him a great deal to make this sacrifice, and that his sacrifice had been in vain.

Thus Dura changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. The great house was empty and desolate. The great bell pealed no more through all the echoes; the noisy comings and goings of the Burtons, the sound of them as they moved about, the dash of Mr. Burton's phaëton and his wife's fine horses, had all died out into the silence. Miss Jane plodded wearily about the village, trying to find some cheap cottage where Stephen could find refuge when the property was sold. And Norah, anxious and pale, and full of many terrors, lived alone in her end of the house, and watched for the postman every morning, and wondered, wondered, till her heart grew sick, why no letters came.

Where was Helen? She had disappeared from them into the unknown, as her husband had done. Where was she? Was it into Hades, into the contracting darkness, that she had followed her lost, as Orpheus followed Eurydice? A week passed, and the silent days crept on, and no one could tell.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HELEN DRUMMOND had a tedious voyage from Southampton to St. Malo. She was not a good sailor, nor indeed a good traveller in any way. She was not rich enough to get for herself those ameliorations of the weariness of journeys which are within the reach of everybody who has money. She had to consult cheapness more than comfort, and when she arrived at last in the bay, with all its rocky islets rising out of the blue, beautiful sea, and the little fortress city reigning over it, and all the white-sailed boats shim-

mering about like so many sea-birds, she would have been unable to observe the beauty of the scene from sheer weariness, if anxiety had not already banished from her every thought but one.

Where was he? how should she find him? was it real? was it possible? could it be true?

The boat was late in arriving; it had been delayed, and was not expected at the moment when the passengers were ready to land. Helen looked, with a beating heart, upon all the loungers on shore, wondering could he be among them; but it was not till almost all her fellow-passengers had left the vessel that a tattered, grinning *commissionnaire* came up to her, and asked if she were Madame Drummond. When she answered, a voluble explanation followed, which Helen, in her agitation, and with ears unaccustomed to the voluble Breton-French mixed with scraps of still less comprehensible English, understood with great difficulty. Monsieur had been on the pier half the night; he had been assured by all the officials that the boat could not arrive till noon. Monsieur had charged himself, François, to be on the watch, and bring him news as soon as the steamer was in sight; in place of which he, the delighted François, would have the gratification of leading Madame to Monsieur. Half dead with excitement and fatigue, Helen followed her guide. He led her along the rocky shore to where a little steam ferry-boat puffed and snorted. Then she had to embark again for a five minutes' passage across the bay. She landed on the other side, so stupefied with suspense, and with the accumulated excitement which was now coming to a climax, that she felt incapable of uttering a word. Her body was all one pulse, throbbing wildly; a crimson flush alternated with dead pallor in her face; her heart choked her, palpitating in her throat. Whom was she going to meet? What manner of man was it who said he was her Robert, who wrote as Robert wrote, who had called her to him, with the force of absolute right? For was not Robert dead, dead, buried under the cold river, seven years ago? She was not happy, she was frightened, as Norah said. Her position was incomprehensible to her. She, Robert's spotless wife, his faithful widow—to whom was she going? She did not know what the words meant that were being poured into her ears. The figures she met whirled past her like monsters in a dream. Her own weary feet obeyed her mechanically; she moved and breathed, and kept command of herself, she knew not how.

There is a little cottage on the very edge of the cliff in that village of Dinard on the Breton coast, which looks across the bay into which the Rouen rushes impetuously meeting the great sea-tides, and from which San Silvester opposite, St. Malo with its walls and towers, all the lip of the bay lined with houses, with fortifications, with bristling masts and sails, show fair in the sunshine. Coming into it from the dusty road, so small is it, so light, so close to the water, the traveller feels that he must have come suddenly into the light poop cabin of some big ship, lifting its breast high from the sea.

Here it was that Helen came in, her frame all one tremble, breathless, stupified, carried along in the wild whirl of some dream. She saw some one get up with a great cry—and then—she saw nothing more. The excitement, the weariness, the strangeness and terror that possessed her were more than she could bear. She fell down at Robert's feet, as she had done at the foot of the picture in the exhibition. It was perhaps the easiest, gentlest way of getting over the great shock and convulsion of the new life that had now to begin.

Helen was conscious after a while of a voice, of two voices talking vaguely over her, one which she did not know, one— At the sound of that her brain tried to rally; she tried to recollect. Where was she?—in St. Mary's Road, in the old days before the studio was built? that was what it felt like. She could not see anything; a whirling, revolving cloud of darkness went round and round, swallowing her up. She tried to raise her hand to grasp at something. Now she was sinking, sinking into that sea which had gleamed upon her for a moment through the window—a sea full of ships, yet with no savour for her. If she could only move her hand, raise her head, see something besides this blinding blackness. And then again that voice? She had fallen, fallen somewhere, and something buzzed loud in her ears, something coming that was about to crush her, on the steps at St. Mary's Road.

"Helen! don't you know me? Look at me, if you can, my own love!"

She gave a long sobbing cry. She opened her eyes heavily. "Yes, Robert," she said. The wonder and the terror had gone away in her faint, with the seven years that united them. (When the soul loses the common thread of time and place it comes back to its primal chamber, to the things in it that are everlasting. She answered out of her unconsciousness as (God send it!) we shall

answer our friends in heaven out of the death-trance, not wondering—restored to the unity of love which is for ever and ever, not for a time.)

She was lying on a little sofa, that window on one side of her, with its glorious sea and sky and sunshine. On the other, a man with hair as white as snow, with Norah's eyes, looking at her in an agony of tenderness, with a face worn and lined by suffering and toil. The sight of him startled her so that she came to herself in a moment. It startled her into the consciousness that she was his wife, and in a manner responsible for him, for his well-being and comfort. She started up, wondering how she could think of herself, indignant at herself for taking up the foreground for a moment. "Oh, my dear, my dear!" she cried. "What have they done to you, Robert?" and drew him to her, taking him into her arms.

Not frightened now, not wondering, not strange at all. The strangeness was that he had been kept away from her so long, cruelly kept away, to make him like this, whitened, worn, old. All at once strength and calm and self-command came back to Helen. Except for his looks, the harm some one had done to him, this interval crinkled away like a burnt paper, and disappeared, and was as if it had never been. She put her arms round him, drew him to her with an indignant love and tenderness. "My poor Robert! my poor Robert! how you have wanted me," she said, with the tears in her eyes.

"Ah! wanted you!" he cried; and he too gave in to this impulse of nature. He was not an impassioned man claiming his own, but a weary one come back to his natural rest. He put his white head down upon hers, and in the relief and sudden ease and consolation, wept like a child. It was more than joy; terrible fears had come to him at the last, terrors that his appeal might be unwelcome—that his recollection might have died out of her heart. He knew that she was in the sight of the world faithful to him; but whether her heart was true, whether the surprise would be a joy, he did not know.

Let us leave them to tell their mutual story. The reader knows one side of it. The other had come about thus. It took a long time to tell it so as to satisfy Helen; but it may be put here into fewer words.

On the night when Robert, as he said, died, he had been picked up by a tug steam-boat, which was on its way down stream to take a vessel going to America down to the sea. He had been all but dead, and with the addition

of all the care, distress, and anxiety through which he had passed before, partial drowning was no joke to him. How it was that he managed to get transferred from the little steamer into the ship, he had never very clearly discovered. Whether he had passionately entreated to be taken on board, or whether he had dashed himself once more into the river and been rescued this time by the sea-going vessel, he could not tell. But, anyhow, he had managed to get on board the American; and there, amid all the discomforts of a merchant ship, where there was no room for passengers, and where his presence was most unwelcome, he had an illness, which made his slow passage across the Atlantic look like a feverish dream to him. He knew nothing about it, except as a horror and misery which had been. When the ship arrived he had been transferred to an hospital, where he lingered until all hope of life had gone out of him, if indeed any ever existed. And then, all at once, and unaccountably, he had got well again, as people do over whom no anxious nurses watch, who are of importance to no one. When he came to life again he was one of the poorest of the poor, unknown, penniless, an object of charity. In that position he could never go home, never make himself known to those whom (he felt) he had ruined, whom he had already made up his mind to leave free at the cost of his life. Forlorn, hopeless, and miserable, poor Robert had still the necessity upon him of maintaining the worthless life which Providence had, as it were, thrust back upon his hands. He went to the studio of a painter in New York—that same John Sinclair whose name had been attached to the "Dives." He had told his story fully and truly. When a man asserts in a painter's studio that he is himself a painter, the means are at hand for the satisfaction of his assertion; and when Robert took the palette in his hand, Mr. Sinclair believed his story. He had begun humbly, under this kind stranger's help; he had become a portrait-painter, a branch of art which, in his youth, he had followed for the sake of bread and butter, as so many do. But Robert, friendless and hopeless, driven out of everything but art, had, by a mere instinct of self-preservation, to keep himself alive, taken to his work in a way which made it a very different thing from the painting which is done for bread and butter. A very little bread and butter sufficed him. But man does not live by bread alone; and all the better aliment, the food of his soul, he had to get somehow out

of his portraits. The consequence of this was, that gradually these portraits became things to talk of, things that people went far to see, and competed to have. He cared so little for it—was that why the stream of fortune came to him? But when his languid soul awoke after a while to a sense of the work he was doing, Robert ceased to care little for it. He began to care much; and as his portraits kept their popularity his gains increased. He became hungry for gain; he grew a miser, and overworked himself, thinking of his wife, thinking of the child to whom he was dead. He managed to get some news of them incidentally through his friend and former patron Sinclair; he heard where they were, and that they were well. At length, when he had scraped so much money together that he thought he might venture upon some communication, his heart went back to the agony of his parting, and the subject of his last sketch returned to him. Ah! was he not Dives now, stretching out vain hands, not daring to cry! He could not summon courage enough to write, but he could paint—he would put all his despairing soul, which yet had a faint hope in it, into that imploring face, those beseeching hands. He worked at it night and day, throwing his whole heart and soul into it. And, with a heart trembling at his own temerity, after he sent his picture to England he himself had come back, but not to England—he had not courage for that. He was not sufficiently instructed to know whether it would be safe for him to go back—whether he might bring the law upon him with fresh bugbears and trouble in its train—but to France. He had come to Brest, and he had wandered to this the nearest point from which communication with England was easy. He had arrived at St. Malo in May, at the very time when Helen saw the picture in the Exhibition, and received its message into her very heart. But he had not ventured to send his letter till months after—not till now.

"Helen!" he said, trembling; "will you stay with me here? will you go back with me, back to New York? What shall we do?"

"Robert, let us go home."

"Can I go home? I do not think so. I have a little money, for the child and you. I made it hardly—after I died. I should not like to give it once again to satisfy people who suffered no more than we did."

"Oh, Robert," she said, "I have my story to tell you too." And her story took

as long in telling as his did ; for it was difficult to her to remember that he knew nothing—that he did not know what he had been accused of ; as difficult as it was for him to understand the allusions she made to the lost books and the censure which had been passed upon his name. He would stop her and say, "What does that mean?" a dozen times in a single sentence. And then, as the story advanced to its climax, impatience seized him, and a growing excitement. He got up from his seat beside her, and paced about the little room. Then she saw, for the first time, that he was lame. How he had suffered ! The seven years had not made much difference to her ; her peaceful life had smoothed out the lines which sorrow had made in her face. There was not a white thread in her brown hair ; she had almost grown younger instead of older, having upon her wherever she went a reflection of Norah's youth, which somehow she shared. But Robert was lame, and walked with difficulty, a consequence of his almost suicide. He was old, thin, white-haired, with furrows of anxiety and longing and heart-hunger in his face. All this had been done by the man who had beguiled him into the doomed bank, who had looked on calmly at his ruin, who had willingly countenanced the destruction of his good name. Mrs. Drummond had lived through it all, had got over her hot fits of rage and indignation, and at this moment had her heart softened towards Reginald Burton, whom she had saved. She was not prepared for the excitement, the suppressed fury, the passionate indignation of her husband, to whom all this was new. She told him of the paper she had extorted from her cousin that last night, "which clears you entirely," she said.

"Clears me!" he cried, gnashing his teeth. "My God! *clears* me! I who have done nothing but suffer by him. Clears me!"

"I do not quite mean that, Robert. You were cleared before. No one believed it. But we thought Golden only was to blame. Now this paper is formal, and explains everything. It makes it all easy for you."

He did not stop, as if this was anything consolatory ; he kept moving up and down, painfully, with his lameness. "And that scoundrel has got off," he cried between his teeth—"got off! and has the audacity to clear me."

Poor Helen was disconcerted. She had forgotten her own fury of indignation when she first saw the accusation against him. She

had long, long grown used to all that, and used to the reflection that nobody believed it whose opinion was worth anything. She had insisted upon Burton's confession and explanation, she scarcely knew why—more as a punishment to him than as a vindication of Robert. She was confused about it altogether, not quite knowing what she meant. And now, in the light of his indignation, she felt almost as if she had done her husband an injury—insulted him. She faltered, and looked at him wistfully, and did not know what to say. She had not lost the habit of love, but she had lost the habit of companionship ; she had told her story wrongly, she did not know how to bring him to her state of feeling, or to transport herself into his. And this too was the fault of the man who had driven Robert to despair—the man whom she had saved.

"He has got off," she said humbly, "by my means. Robert, I tried revenge once, but I will never try it again. I could not give him up, however bad he had been, when he was in my power."

The sound of trembling in her voice went to his heart. "My poor Helen! my sweet Helen!" he cried, coming to her. "Do you think I blame you? You could not have done otherwise. For you there was but one course—but if I had the chance now—"

Just then there was a commotion at the door, and sounds of many voices. A great many exclamations in French, with one or two broken questions in English, came to their ears. "You has you papiers. Dommm you papiers. You say you is Jean—Jean Smiff, et pas—"

"Je me fie à monsieur ici. Monsieur est-il chez lui? C'est un Anglais. Il nous expliquera tout ça," said another voice. It was the voice of the maire, whom Robert had made friends with in his hunger for human companionship. The parley at the door went on for a few minutes longer, and then there entered a band of excited Frenchmen. One, a gendarme from St. Malo, carried an open telegram in his hand ; another, in a blouse, kept his hand upon the shoulder of a burly Englishman in a light coat. The maire brought up the rear. They seemed such a crowd of people as they entered the little, light room, that it was some moments before the three English people thus brought face to face recognised each other. Helen with difficulty suppressed a cry. Robert stood confronting the party with the flush of his indignation not yet subsided, with a wonder beyond words in his eyes. As for the

other, he showed no sign of surprise. He was driven back to his last stronghold, forced to use all his strength to keep himself up and maintain his courage. His eye dilated and gave a flutter of wonder at the sight of Helen. It was evident that he did not recognise her companion. He kept his arms folded, as if for self-preservation, to keep within him all the warmth, all the courage possible, physically to keep up and support himself.

The three men rushed into explanation all at once. A telegram had been received at St. Malo, describing an Englishman who was supposed to have gone there, and whose description, in the telegram which the gendarme held out, corresponded exactly with that of the prisoner. The prisoner, however, called himself Smith—Smiff—or Smitt, as his pursuers pronounced it—and produced papers which were *en règle*; but he could not explain what he was doing here; he showed no inclination to be taken to the English consul. On the contrary, he had crossed to Dinard as soon as he heard that inquiries had been made about him at his hotel. While all this was being told the stranger stood immovable, with his arms folded; he did not understand half of it. His French was as deficient as the French of untravelled Englishmen usually is, and the tumult around him, at the same time, confused his mind and quickened his outward sense. He could not make out what his chances of liberation were: but his eyes were open to any possibility of escape. They were bloodshot and strained those eyes; now and then a flutter of wonder, of excitement, of watchfulness, came into them, but he showed no other sign of emotion. At such a terrible crisis all secondary sensations perish; he had no time to wonder what Helen, whom he had left behind in England, should be doing here. Rather it was natural that every body connected with his fate should be here, gathering around him silently to see the end.

Thus this encounter had but little effect upon Burton; but it would be impossible to describe the effect it had upon the man who stood opposite to him, whom he had not recognized. Robert Drummond had suffered as few men ever suffered. He had died—he had come alive again—he had lived two separate lives. For some years up to this day his existence had been that of a man deprived of all the hopes and consolations of life—a man miserably alone, dead to every one belonging to him. Even the return to life which he had tried to realise this morn-

ing was no more than an experiment. He might never be able to conquer, to forget those seven ghosts which stood between him and his wife and child. He could not take up his life again where he left it—that was impossible. And all this had been done by the influence of the man before him, who was in his power, whom he might if he would give over to prison and trial and punishment. A gleam of fierce joy shot through Drummond's heart, and then—

They stood facing each other, with the Frenchmen grouped about them. But Burton had not, beyond the first glance, looked at his judge. His face confronted him, but his eyes did not; he had escaped as yet the knowledge who it was.

A thousand and a thousand thoughts whirled through Drummond's mind; he had only a moment to decide in; he had the past to satisfy, and the burning, fiery indignation of the present moment, in which for the first time he had identified and comprehended the past. Give him up! punish him! Should such a scoundrel get off, when innocent men had so bitterly suffered. Let him fall and bring down in his train all who were concerned—all who made a prey of the ignorant and the poor! This wave of thoughts possessed him with a whirl and sweep like the rushing tide—and then there came the interval of silence, the moment when the waters fell back and all was still.

Revenge! "I tried revenge once, but I will never try it again!" Who was it that had said this close to him, so that the very air repeated and repeated it, whispering it in his ear? He had himself been dead, and he had come alive again. His new life, which had commenced this morning, was spotless as yet. He had to decide, decide, decide in a moment how it should be inaugurated, by mercy or by judgment—by the sin (was it not a sin?) of helping the escape of a criminal, or by the righteous deed (where was it said that this might be a sin too?) of handing him over to punishment. How his soul was tossed upon these waves! He stood as in the midst of a great battle, which raged round him. Fierce arrows tore his heart, coming from one side and another; he could not tell how. Give up the accursed thing—punish the unworthy soul—be just! be just! But then that other, "Neither have I condemned thee; go and sin no more." And all had to be done in a minute, while those voluble explanations interlaced each other, and each man showed his difficulty. Drummond glanced at his wife for help, but she dared

not look at him. She sat on the sofa against the light, with her hands tightly clasped in her lap. Was she praying? For so long, out of the depths of his hell, Dives, poor Dives, had not dared to pray.

He did not know what he said when at length he spoke; it was some commonplace, some nothing. But it attracted at once the attention of the prisoner. Burton turned round, and gazed at the man whom he thought dead. He did not recognise the voice, except that it was a voice he knew; he did not even recognise the face, which had grown prematurely old, framed in its white hair, at the first glance; but there crept over him a shudder of enlightenment, a glance of perception. His senses were quickened by his own position. He shook where he stood as if with cold or palsy. He looked at Helen, he looked at the man by her side. Then an inarticulate cry came from him; terror of he knew not what deprived him, fortunately, of all power of speech. He fell back in his fear, and his attendants thought he meant to escape. They threw themselves between him and the door. It was then that Drummond spoke in his haste, scarcely knowing what he said.

"I know him," he said in French. "It is a long time since we have met, and he has just recognised me, you perceive. We are not friends, so you may trust me. His papers are quite right, and it is a mistake about the telegram. Look here; this is not his description. 'Nez. ordinaire;' why, he has a long nose. 'Teint brun;' he is quite fresh-coloured, and his hair is grey. This is a great mistake. Monsieur le Maire, I know the man, and I will be responsible for him. You must let him go."

"I thought so," said the *maire du village*, pleased with his own divination. "Je l'ai dit. Monsieur nous expliquera tout ça. Voilà que j'ai dit."

"Mais, monsieur—" began the gendarme. Helen sat against the light, seeing nothing, and closed her eyes, and clasped her hands in her lap. Burton, bewildered and terror-stricken, looked on without showing any emotion. Perhaps the imperviousness in his face was his best safeguard. Five minutes of expostulation and explanation followed, and then gradually the Frenchmen edged themselves out of the room. Fortunately, Monsieur le Maire had taken this view from the beginning; he had been sure it was a mistake. When they were got rid of at last, the three who were left behind looked at each other in a silence which was more

significant than words. Burton dropped into a chair; he was not able to stand nor to speak, but kept gazing at Drummond with a pitiful wonder and terror. At last—

"Are you Robert Drummond?" he asked hoarsely. "Have you come back from your grave—?"

"I am Robert Drummond," said the other; "and you are John Smith, who must be got out of here as soon as possible. Have you money?"

"Yes."

"Then I advise you to go away at once. Go up to Dinan by the river-side, or walk to St. Briem to get the train. In the one case you are on your way to Brest, where there are ships always sailing; by the other you can get to Paris or wherever you please. You may wait here till the evening, if you choose; but then go."

"I will go to Brest," he said humbly.

"I would rather not know where you went; but go you must. My wife and I met to-day for the first time in seven years; we do not wish for company, you may suppose."

Drummond's voice was very stern. He had no compassion for the man who stood thus humbled and miserable before him; not for him had he done this. And Burton was too much stupified, too much bewildered, to make any direct reply. He looked at Helen with dull wonder, and asked under his breath—

"Did you know?"

"No," she said. "It came upon me almost as suddenly as upon you."

Then he pulled some papers out of his pocket.

"These are English papers. I don't know if it is long since you have left. But you might like to see them." When he had done this, he made a few steps towards the door, where the old Frenchwoman was waiting to show him where to go. Then he paused, and turned round again, facing them. "What a man says in my position is very little to anybody," he said; "but—I want to say to you, Forgive me. I have helped to do you dreadful harm; but I—I did not mean it. I never meant it. I meant to get gain myself; but I never wished to harm you."

And then he disappeared, saved again, saved at his uttermost need—surely this time finally saved—and by those whom he had injured the most. When he reached the clean little room where he was to stay all day, it appeared to Reginald Burton that

he must be in a dream. The same feeling had been in his mind ever since he escaped from England. All was strange to him, and strangest of all the fact that he could not longer command or regulate matters by his own will, but was the sport of circumstances, driven about he knew not how. His bewilderment was so great that he was not able to think. Saved first by a helpless woman, whose powers he would have laughed at a month ago; saved now by a ghost out of the grave!

That night he left Dinan under cover of the darkness, and walked to St. Briem, where he got the train for Brest. He arrived there in time to get on board of a vessel about to sail for America. And thus Reginald Burton escaped from the immediate penal consequences of his sins. From the other consequences no man ever escapes. The prison, the trial, the weary round of punishment he had eluded; but his life was over and ended, and everything that was worth having in the world had abandoned him. Love was not his to carry away with him; reputation, honour, wealth, even comfort was gone. He had to make a miserable new beginning, to shrink into poverty, obscurity, and dependence. It would be hard to say whether these were more or less easy to bear than the prison work, prison life, prison garb from which he had escaped.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THIS was the end of Mr. Burton of Dura—Mr. Burton, of the great City firm, he who had been known as one of the greatest of commercial magnitudes, he who had ruined as many people as if he had been an emperor. For some time there was a very great deal about it in the newspapers, and his concerns were exposed to the light of day. He involved a great many others with him in his downfall, and some in his shame. If he had been taken, he would have joined in prison those men whom in our own day we have seen degraded from a high position in society down to the picking of oakum in gaol—men whom we all pour our loathing upon at the moment of their discovery, but of whom we say "poor souls!" a few months after, when some chosen newspaper correspondent has a peep at them, disguised in the prison garb, and known as numbers 300 and 301. Burton missed the prison and the pity; but he did not miss the punishment. In spite of various attempts that were made to stop it, the investigation

of his affairs was very full and clear. It became apparent from his own private books, and that one of Rivers's which had been found in his safe, that the bank had been in reality all but ruined when it was made into a joint-stock company. Burton and his colleague had guaranteed the debts, and put the best face possible upon things generally; and Mr. Golden's management, and an unexpected run of good luck, had all but carried the labouring concern into clear water. It was at this period that Burton, thanking his stars or his gods, withdrew from the share to the management which he had held nominally, and left it to Golden to complete the triumph of daring and good fortune. How this failed is already known to the reader. The mystery of the lost books was never cleared up; for Golden was out of the way, enjoying his honeymoon, when the private affairs of the other conspirator were thus thrown open to the light of day. But there was enough in the one book found among Mr. Burton's to show how very inconvenient to him the finding of the others would have been. Thus daylight blazed upon all those tortuous, gloomy paths, and showed how the desire of self-interest guided the man through them, with an absolute indifference to the interests of others. He had not meant any harm, as he said; he had meant his own gain in the first place, his own recovery when his position was threatened, his own safety when danger came. He had not set out with a deliberate intention of ruining others; but this is a thing which nobody ever does; and he had not cared afterwards how many were ruined, so that he could hold on his way. Such cases happen now and then, and human justice cannot touch them; but more generally miseries come sooner or later. Even at the worst, however, his material punishment was never so hard as that of some of his victims. The loss of the trust-money, which had been the immediate cause of his ruin, took the very bread out of the mouths of a family of orphans; but Mr. Burton, at the lowest depths of his humiliation, had always bread enough, and to spare. He was never even thrown into such mental anxiety, such stress of painful calculation, as that into which the inhabitants of the Gatehouse were thrown by his downfall. Miss Jane went painfully all over Dura, looking at the cottages, to see if by any means something could be found or contrived to suit Stephen; and her heart sank within her as she inspected the damp, horrible places, which were so very different

from the warm old wainscoted rooms, the comfort of the Gatehouse. When the property was sold, however, it was found that the Gatehouse had been made into a separate lot, and had been bought, not by the rich descendant of the old Harcourts who had got Dura, but by some one whose name was unknown.

"Somebody who was going to live in the house himself, no doubt," Miss Jane said, with a very long face; "and I am sure I wish him well in it, whoever he may be," she added with a struggle. "But oh, Norah! what a thing it will be for us to go away!"

"If I knew him I would go to him, and beg for your rooms for you. He never would have the heart to turn you out if he was a good man," cried Norah. "For us it does not matter; but oh, Miss Jane, for you!"

"It cannot be helped, my dear," said Miss Jane, drying her eyes. "We have no right to it, you know. It does seem hard that we should be ruined by his prosperity, and then, as it were, ruined again by his downfall. It seems hard; but it is not anybody's fault. Of course when we accepted it we knew the penalty. He might have turned us out at any time. No, Norah; we have no reason to complain."

"That makes it worse," cried impulsive Norah. "It is always a comfort when one can think it is somebody's fault. And so it is—Mr. Burton's fault. Oh, how much harm he has done! Oh, what a destroyer he has been! He has done as much harm as a war or a pestilence," cried Norah. "Think of poor—papa!"

She had always to make a pause before that name, not believing in it, somehow, feeling it hurt her. By this time she had heard all about the meeting between her father and mother, and the day had been fixed when she was to join them; but still she had a sore, wounding, jealous sense that the new father was her rival—that he might be almost her enemy. Fathers on the whole seemed but an equivocal advantage to Norah. There was Mr. Burton, who had ruined and shamed every one connected with him; and there was poor—papa, who might, for anything she knew, take all the gladness out of her own life.

"Oh, hush, my dear!" said Miss Jane. "Mr. Burton has been a bitter acquaintance to us; but he is Ned's father, and we must not complain."

Just then there was a knock at the door, and Ned himself came in. He came from

town, as he did often, to spend the evening with his betrothed. Their days were running very short now, and their prospects were not encouraging. He had not even time to look for any employment for himself, so much was he occupied with his father's affairs; and Norah was going away, and when should they meet again? These evenings which they spent together were very sweet; but they were growing daily sadder as they approached more closely to the shadow of the farewell. But this time Ned came in with a flush of pleasure in his face. His eyes were so brightened by it, and his color so much improved, that he looked "quite handsome," Miss Jane thought; and he walked in with something of the impulsive satisfaction of old days.

"My grandfather is a brick," he said, "after all. He has given me my fortune. He has helped me to do something I had set my heart on. Miss Jane, don't think any more of leaving the Gatehouse. So long as I live nobody can turn you out."

"What do you mean, Ned?"

"I mean that dear old grandpapa has been awfully good to me," said Ned, "and the Gatehouse is mine. I love it, Miss Jane. Don't you say anything. You may think it will be bitter for me to come here after all that has passed; but I love it. Since ever I was a boy, I have thought this room the dearest place in the world—ever since Norah sat and talked rubbish and frightened me out of my life. How well I remember that. She has forgotten years ago; but I will never forget. What are you crying about, Miss Jane? Now this is very hard upon a fellow, I must say. I thought it was good news."

"And so it is—blessed news, you dear, dear, kind boy!" cried Miss Jane. "Oh, children! what can I say to you? God bless you! And God will bless you for thinking of the afflicted first, before yourselves."

"I had nothing to do with it—I knew nothing about it," cried Norah proudly; and all at once, without any warning, she threw herself upon Ned, and gave him a sudden kiss on his brown cheek. For five minutes after none of the three were very coherent; for to do a good action when you are young makes you feel very foolish, and ready to cry with any one who cares to cry. Ned told them all about it between laughing and sobbing—how his grandfather had given him his portion, and how it was the best possible investment to buy the Gatehouse. "For you see," said Ned, "when Norah makes up her mind to marry, we shall have a house

all ready As for anybody here knowing what has happened, everybody all over the country knows," he added with a hot flush on his cheek; "and at Dura people like me—a little, and would not be unkind, as in other places. And how could I let the place Norah had been brought up in—the place I love—go to other people? So, Miss Jane, be happy, and set your brother's mind at rest. Nobody shall disturb you here as long as I live; and if I should die, it would go to Norah."

"Oh, Ned, hush!" cried Norah, putting up her hand to his lips.

And then they went out into the garden, and wandered about and talked. Nothing but this innocent and close conversation, with no one to think it might be improper or to call them to account, could have made exactly such a bond as that which existed between these two innocent young souls. They were lovers, and yet they were half brother and sister. They talked of their plans with the wistful certainty and uncertainty of those who feel that another will may come in to shatter all their purposes, though in themselves they are so unalterable and sure. There was this always hanging over them, like the sword in the fable, of which they were conscious, though they would not say a word about it. To-night their spirits were raised. The fact that this familiar place was *theirs*, that Ned was actually its master, that here they might spend their days together as man and wife, exhilarated them into childish delight.

"I always think of you as in that room," he said to her, "when I picture my Norah to myself; and there is never half an hour all day long that I don't do that. I always see the old curtains and the funny old furniture. And to think it is ours, Norah, and that we shall grow old here, too!"

"I never mean to grow old," said Norah. "Fancy, Ned, mamma is not old, and she is nineteen years older than me. Nineteen years—twenty years! It is as good as a century; it will never come to an end!"

"Or if it does come to an end," said wise Ned, in the additional discretion of two years' additional age, "at least we shall have had our day."

With this chastened yet delightful consciousness of the life before them they parted that evening. But next time they met Ned was not equally bright. He had been very sorely tried by the newspapers, by the shame he had to bear, by the looks askance which were bestowed on "Burton's son."

"I never shall be able to stay there," he said, pouring out his troubled heart to Norah. "I cannot bear it. Fancy having to hear one's father insulted, and not being able to say a word. I cannot do it; oh, Norah, I cannot! We must give up the thought of living here. I must go abroad."

"Where, Ned?"

"Oh, I don't know. America, Australia—anywhere. I cannot stay here. Anywhere that I can earn my bread."

"Ned," said Norah, her happy voice all tuned to tones of weeping. "Remember I am mamma's only child. She has got—some one else now; but, after all, I am her only child."

"Do you think I forget that?" he said. "It is because I am afraid, because I feel, they will never, never trust you to me—so useless as I am—my father's son. Oh, Norah, when I think it all over, my heart is like to break!"

"But, Ned, you were in such good heart last night."

"Ah, but last night was different. My own Norah! if they said no, dear, if they were angry—Oh, Norah! don't hate me for saying it—what would you do?"

"What could I do?" she said, with her brown eyes blazing, half in indignation, half in resolution. "And what do you think they are made of, Ned, to dare to say such a thing to me? Was mamma ever cruel? I would do just what I will do now; I would say, 'Ned, please don't, dear! Ned, don't!' But if you would, notwithstanding all I said to you, of course I must go too."

"My own Norah! But now they are going to take you away from me, and when, when shall I see you again?"

"People go to St. Malo by the boat," said Norah demurely. "It sails from Southampton, and it gets there in I don't remember how many hours. There is nothing against people going to St Malo that want to go."

And thus once more the evening had a more cheerful termination. But none of the party were cheerful when Norah picked up all her little belongings, and went up to town to Dr. Maurice, who was to be her escort. Probably, of all the party, she herself was the most cheerful; for she was the one who was going away to novelties which could not but be more or less agreeable to her imagination, while the others, in the blank of their daily unchanging existence, were left behind. Miss Jane cried over her, Mrs. Haldane bade God bless her, and as for Stephen, he drew her close to him, and could not speak.

"I don't know what life will be worth, Norah, without your mother and you," he said, looking up to her at last with the patient smile he had worn since ever Norah could remember—the one thing in the world which was more pathetic than sorrow itself; for he loved Helen, and missed her to the bottom of his heart—loved her as a disabled, shipwrecked man may love a woman altogether out of his reach, most purely, most truly, without hope or thought of any return; but as no man may justly love a woman who has her husband by her side. This visionary difference, which is yet so real, Stephen felt, and it made him very sad; and the loss of the child gave him full warrant to look as sad as he felt.

"But, oh, Stephen! let us not complain," said Mrs. Haldane; "for has it not been shown to us beyond all question that everything is for the best?"

All for the best! All that had happened—Mr. Burton's ruin, the tragical overthrow of his family, the destruction of poor Ned's hopes and prospects, the shame and humiliation and misery—had all been so "overruled," as Mrs. Haldane would have said, that their house was more firmly secured to them than ever, and was theirs, most likely, as long as Stephen lived. It was a small matter to be procured at such a cost; but yet it was a satisfaction to her to feel that so many laws had been overthrown on her account, and that all was for the best.

As for Ned's parting with Norah, it is a thing which must not be spoken of. It took place in the cab in which her young lover conveyed her from the station to Dr. Maurice's door. Ah, what rending of the young hearts there was as they tore themselves asunder! What big, hollow eyes, with the tears forced back from them, what gulps of choking sorrow swallowed down, as Ned, looking neither to the right hand nor the left, started away from Dr. Maurice's door!

To tell the truth, Dr. Maurice himself was not very comfortable either. He had got a great fright, and he had not recovered from it. His brain was still confused; he felt as if he had been beaten about the head; a dull, hot color dwelt upon his cheeks. He tried to explain it to himself that he was feverish; but he was not feverish—or at least it was only his mind, not his body, which was so. It was partly wonder, but chiefly it was fright, on account of his own marvellous and hair-breadth escape. At the time when he had made that proposal to Helen, he believed, as she did, and everybody else, that her

husband had died years ago. And, good heavens! what if she had not refused? Dr. Maurice grew hot and cold all over, he actually shuddered at the supposition. And yet such a thing might have happened. He went reluctantly, yet with curiosity, to see his old friend. He wondered with a confused and troubled mind whether Helen would have said anything about it—whether Drummond would take any notice of it. The doctor was impatient with Drummond, and dissatisfied altogether as to his conduct. A man, he reflected, cannot do that sort of thing with impunity. To be for seven years as though he had never been, and then to come to life again and interfere with everybody's affairs! It was hard. Drummond had got his full share of sympathy; he had turned his whole world upside down. Seven years ago he had been mourned for as few men are mourned; and now it was a mistake, it was almost an impertinence, that he should come to life again, as if nothing had happened. But nevertheless Dr. Maurice volunteered to take Norah to St. Malo. He was glad to do it—to rub out the recollection of that false step of his—to show that he bore no malice, and that no thoughts were in his mind which were inconsistent with his old friendship for Robert and respect for Robert's wife.

Robert's wife! She had called herself so when she was but Robert's widow. But nobody understood, nobody thought, what a change it was to Helen to fish up her old existence again, and resume its habits as if there had been no break in it. Love had conquered the strangeness at first; but there were so many strangenesses to be conquered. She had fallen into so different a channel from that into which his thoughts had been diverted. They were both unchanged in their affections; but how different in everything else! They were each other's nearest, closest, dearest; and yet they had to make acquaintance with each other over again. Nothing can be more strange than such a close union, accompanied by such a total ignorance. It was not even as if Helen had remained as he had known her—had received no new influences into her life. Both had an existence unknown to the other. Robert in the joy of his recovered identity, in the happiness of finding that there was still love and companionship for him in the world, took the reunion more simply than Helen did, and ignored its difficulties, or did not feel them. He had always taken things more simply than she. His absolute faith

in her, his simple delight in finding her, his fond admiration of her, revived in Helen some of her old feelings of suppressed wonder and half doubt. But that doubt was humbler now than it had been once. In the old life a ghost of impatience had been in her; she had doubted his powers, and chafed at his failures. Now she began to doubt whether she had ever understood him—whether she had done him injustice. For once, at least, Robert had risen to that height of power which passion sometimes forces almost beyond the height of genius. He had made alive and put upon a dead piece of canvas, for all the world to see, one face which was a revelation out of the worlds unknown. Helen's heart had never wanted any additional bond to the husband whom she had chosen and clung to through good and evil; but her mind had wanted something more than his easy talent, his exquisite skill, the gentle, modest pitch of imagination which was all that common life moved him to. But on that point she was satisfied now. The only drawback was, she was no longer sure that it was Robert. He was himself, and yet another. He was her own by a hundred tender signs and sureties; and yet he was strange to her—strange!

And it was thus, with a suppressed excitement, which neither told, that the reunited pair awaited their child's coming. She breathless with curiosity and anxiety to know what Norah should think of her unknown father; he eager to make acquaintance with the new creature whom he knew only as a child. "The child" he called her, till Helen smiled at his pertinacity, and ceased to remind him that Norah was no longer a child. Their excitement rose very high when the steamboat came in. Helen's feelings were, as usual, by far the most complicated. Norah was her own creation, if we may say so, framed by her, cultivated by her—not only flesh of her flesh, but heart of her heart, and mind of her mind; yet the influence of Norah's opinions, Norah's ways of thinking, was strong upon her mother, almost more strong than Helen's were on Norah; for the latter had all the confidence of youth, the former all the hesitation of middle age. What if Norah should not "take to" the new father—the stranger who yet was so truly her own Robert of old? Neither the one nor the other even so much as recollected Dr. Maurice—the poor man who was bracing up his courage to meet them, wondering what they might think. And they thought of him simply not at all.

And Norah approached that rocky shore with an unconcealable, almost avowed, jealousy of her father. A shade of that emotion, half shame, half pain, with which a young woman regards her mother's second marriage was in her mind. It was a partial desecration of her idea of her mother, and she was jealous of the new companion who naturally must be more to Helen than even she herself could be. She was jealous, though she had long given her mother a rival more dangerous still in Ned; but in such feelings no one is reasonable. Dr. Maurice had stolen into her confidence, she knew not how, and, partly out of pure perversity, was very strenuous in Ned's favor, and had promised to plead his cause. The wretched man was almost glad that there should be this new complication coming along with Norah, to perplex from the very beginning her father's relations with her. Had things been as he once hoped—had he been able to make Norah his own child, as he had tried to do—then he would have resisted Ned to his last gasp; but as she was not his, he was wickedly glad that she should not be altogether Robert's, but that from the first his should be but a divided proprietorship.

"I will do what I can to make things easy for you, Norah," he said, as they drew near St. Malo, half out of love, half out of spite. "I will give you what I meant to leave you, and that should get over part of the difficulty."

"Oh, Dr. Maurice, you have always been so good to me!" cried heedless Norah. "If it had been you instead of papa——"

She was angry with herself when she had made that foolish, hasty speech; but, oh! how sweet it was to her companion! What balm it shed upon those awkward sorenesses of his! He drew her hand through his arm, and leaned upon her with the tenderest looks.

"It would be strange if I did not do my best for my little Norah," he said, with something like a tear in his eye. Hypocrite! If she had been his little Norah, then heaven have mercy upon poor Ned!

They landed, and there was all the flutter and agitation of meeting, which was more confusing, more agitating, than meetings generally are, though these are always hard enough to manage. They went together across the bay to the little cottage on the cliff. They took a long time to settle down. Robert hung about his child as if she had been a new toy, unable to keep from gazing at her, touching her, recalling what she was,

glorying and rejoicing over the possession of her; while Helen, on her side, watched too with a painful closeness, reading the thoughts in Norah's eyes before they had come. She wanted to jump into certainty at once. But they had to eat, and drink, and rest; they had to talk of all that had happened—of all that might yet happen. And so the first days passed, and the family unconsciously reunited itself, and the extraordinary sank, no one knowing how, into the blessed calm of every day.

And then there occurred an event which took all the company by surprise: Norah fell in love with her father. She "took to" him as a girl might be expected to take to a man whose image she was. She was more like him a great deal than she was like her mother. Her hasty, impulsive ways, the fresh simplicity of soul, were all his. She had been thought to resemble her mother before; but when she was by her father's side, it was apparent in a moment who she most resembled. She discovered it herself with a glow of delight. "Why, mamma, he is like me!" she cried, with a delightful youthful innocence. And poor Helen did not quite like it. It is terrible, but it is true—for the first moment it gave her a pang. The child had been all hers; she had almost ceased to remember that there could be any sharing of her. She had been anxious about Norah's reception of her father; but she was not quite prepared for this. Dr. Maurice, for his part, was simply furious, and went as near hating Robert Drummond as it was possible to do; but then, of course, that feeling on Maurice's part was simply ludicrous, and deserved nothing but to be laughed at. This curious event made the most *tragi-comic* conclusion in the cottage on the cliff.

CHAPTER XLV.

AND now all the threads are shortening in the shuttle, and the web is nearly woven out. If any one has ever supposed for a moment that Robert Drummond and his wife would make a last appearance as cruel parents, interfering with their daughter's happiness, it does not say much for the historian's success in elucidating their characters. If Norah had wanted to marry a bad man, they would no doubt have made a terrible stand, and made themselves very unhappy; but when it was only their own prejudices, and poverty, and other external disadvantages that had to be taken into

account, nothing but the forecasting imagination of two timid lovers could have feared for the result. When two people have themselves married upon nothing, it is so much more easy for them to see how that can be managed over again; and, heaven save you good people! so many of us used to marry upon nothing in the old days.

But a great deal had to happen before this could come to pass. The Drummonds went home to England late in the autumn, and Robert was received back by the world with such acclamations as perhaps have not greeted a man of his profession in England for ages. Of itself the picture of "Dives" had made a great impression upon the general mind; but when his strange story became public, and it was known that the picture of the year had been painted by a man risen, as it were, out of the grave, warmer still became the interest in it. The largest sum which had been given for a picture for years was offered for this to the resuscitated painter. Helen, always visionary, revolted from the very thought of selling this picture, which had been the link between herself and her husband, and which had so many associations to them both; but Robert had too much practical good sense to yield to this romantic difficulty. "I am no longer Dives," he said, as he drew his wife's arm through his own, and took her out with him to conclude the bargain. It increased the income which Robert's American gains brought him, and made them a great deal more comfortable. But Helen would never visit at the great house where "Dives" was, and she would have given half her living to have possessed the greatest work her husband ever produced—the only one by which, all the critics said, he would be known to posterity. This was one of the disappointments of her new life, and it was without doubt an unreasonable disappointment, as so many are that sting us most deeply. The Drummonds were so fortunate, after some waiting and bargaining, as to secure their old house in St. Mary's Road, with the studio in which such happy and such terrible hours had been passed. It was beyond their means; but yet they made an effort to purchase this pleasure for themselves. And here for two years the family lived together unbroken. Now and then they went to the Gatehouse, and made the hearts of the Haldanes glad. And painters would throng about the studio, and the old life came back as if it had never had a break. By times Helen would sit in the familiar room, and

ask herself was it *now*—the present—or was it the past which had come back? The difference was, there was no child curled against the window, with brown hair about her shoulders, and a book in her arms, but only that slim, fair, brown-eyed maiden, who wore a ring of betrothal upon her finger, and had thoughts which travelled far by times after her distant lover, and that the master of the house, when he came into the room, was not the light-footed, youthful-browed Robert of old, but a white-haired man, growing old before his time. These were the changes; but everything else was unchanged.

Robert Drummond, however, never painted another picture like that "Dives;" it was the one passion-flower, the single great blossom, of his life. He painted other pictures as he used to do, which were good Drummonds, specimens of that master which the picture-dealers were very willing to have and collectors to add to their treasures, but which belonged to a world altogether distinct from the other. This Helen felt too with a gentle pang, but not as she had felt it of old. Once he had risen above that pleasant, charming level of beautiful mediocrity; once he had painted, not in common pigments, but in colours mixed with tears and life-blood. At such a cost even she was glad that no more great works should be produced. She was satisfied; her craving for genius and fame had once been fed, almost at the cost of their lives, and now she was content to descend to the gentler, lower work—the work by which men earn their daily bread.

Ah! but even then, even now, had it been—not Raphael, perhaps, who was one of the Shaksperian men, without passion, who do the work of gods as if they were the humanest, commonest of labourers—but such a fiery soul as that of Michelangelo whom this woman had mated! But it was not so. She could have understood the imperfection which is full of genius; what she was slow to understand was the perfection in which no genius was. But she was calmed and changed by all she had gone through, and had learned how dearly such excellence may be bought, and that life is too feeble to bear so vast a strain. Accordingly, fortified and consoled by the one gleam of glory which had crowned his brows, Helen smiled upon her painter, and took pleasure in his work, even when it ceased to be glorious. That was over; but the dear common life—the quiet, blessed routine of every day—that ordinary existence, with love to lighten it, and work to

burden it, and care and pleasure intermingled, which, apart from the great bursts of passion and sorrow and delight that come in from time to time, is the best blessing God gives to man—that had come back, and was here in all its fulness, in fellowship and content.

Norah lived at home with her parents for two years, the reason of which was, not that they objected to poor Ned, but that Ned was so sick at heart with all that he had suffered, that he was not capable of settling down to such work as could be produced for him in England. He was "Burton's son," and though even the people who looked cold at him on account of his parentage would soon have forgotten it, Ned himself could not forget. There was even a moment of despair in which he had declared that he would not share his disgrace with the girl he loved, but would carry it with him to his grave as soon as might be, and trouble no one any more. This state of mind alarmed Norah dreadfully, but it did not alarm the more experienced persons, who were aware that the mind at one-and-twenty has a great many vagaries, and is not always to be taken at its word. The despair came to a sudden end when Ned found himself suddenly appointed to a vice-consulship in an Italian seaport, where his chief made him do all the work, and where he received very little of the pay. When this serious moment came, and life had to be fairly looked in the face, Ned came to himself—he became a reasonable creature. Of course, after his despair, his first idea was to be married instantly; but finally he consented to wait until something better—something they could live on—could be procured for him. He bore his banishment valiantly, and so did Norah. And it did him good; he began to forget that he was "Burton's son;" the whole terrible story began to steal out of his mind with that blessed facility which belongs to youth. His sky brightened from those early clouds; his mind, which was a very good, clear, capable intelligence, developed and strengthened; and finally, the exertions of his mother and grandfather, and those of Drummond, who had some influence too among great people who were lovers of art, procured him an appointment at home. Ned would have nothing to do with business; he shuddered at the very name of it, and rejected the plans his kind grandfather had formed for him with a repugnance which was almost horror. Mr. Baldwin did not understand how the boy could be so foolish; but his mother understood, and subdued all

opposition. Instead of taking his chance, therefore, of commerce, with the hope of becoming in his turn a millionaire, Ned made himself very happy in the public service on a few hundreds a year. If he lived long enough, and nobody was promoted over him, and nothing happened to him or the office, the chances were that after thirty years or so he might find himself in enjoyment of a thousand a year. And all the family said to each other, "That is very good, you know, for a young man without much interest," and congratulated Ned as if he had the thousand a year already which was thirty years off, and subject to all the chances of good and evil fortune, of economical ministers, and those public crises which demand the sacrifices of junior clerks. But notwithstanding all these things, Ned was very happy in his new appointment, and his marriage-day drew nigh.

Mrs. Burton had lived for some time with her father and her aunts at Clapham—as long, indeed, as she could bear it; then she took a little house in town. She had given up half of her settlement to her husband's creditors; and whether she measured her sacrifice by her own knowledge of human nature, or did it simply in the kindness of her heart, after Ned's careless reception of the larger offering which she was willing to have made for him, certain it is that she got much more honour from the public renunciation of the half than she would have done had she let the whole go, as she once intended. Her magnanimity was in all the papers, and everybody commended the modest, unexaggerated sacrifice. And she had still a very good income of her own, derived from the half she retained. Her life in London, she thought, was happier than at Clapham. Yet, perhaps, a doubt may be entertained on this subject; for a life so limited was hard to her, however luxurious it might be. She did not care for luxuries; but she did care to watch the secret movements of life, to penetrate the secrets of human machinery, to note how men meet the different emergencies of their existence. She gathered a little society round her who were as fond of this pursuit as herself; but unless they could have provided themselves with cases on which to operate, this could not do them much good, and it was dry fun to be driven to scrutinizing each other. She thought she was happier in her tiny house in Mayfair, where she kept three maids and a man, and was extremely comfortable; but I believe that in reality her time of highest enjoyment

was also her time of greatest suffering, when she was ruling her own little world at Dura, and seeing her house tumble to pieces, and holding out against fate. She had had a chance for a moment of a better life when her son came back, and touched with a careless, passing hand those chords of her heart which had never vibrated before. But the touch was careless, momentary. Before that vibration had done more than thrill through her, the thoughtless hand was lifted, and the opportunity over, and Mrs. Burton, with her soft cynic smile, her perfect toleration for the wants and weaknesses of humanity, her self-contained and self-sufficing character, had returned to herself. She was proud, very proud, in her way, and she was never betrayed into such weakness again. Which was to blame, the mother or the son, it would be hard to say; and yet Ned could hardly be blamed for failing to perceive an opportunity which he never guessed at nor dreamed of. Some exceptional sympathetic natures might perhaps by instinct have felt the power that had been put into their hands; but it is impossible to say that he was to blame for not feeling it. Of all human creatures in this chilly universe, Ned remained the one who most deeply interested his mother. She made no opposition to his marriage; she even made a distinct effort to like and to attract Norah, who on her side did her best to be affectionate and filial to the woman whose cold gentleness and softness of manner was so unlike her own. It was an experiment which mutually could not be said to have failed. They were always, as people say, on the best of terms; but so far as any real *rapprochement* went, it cannot be said that it succeeded. Ned's life, however, such as it was, was the one point in her family to which Mrs. Burton could turn without that emotion of calmly observant contempt—if the sentiment could be described as anything so decided or warm as contempt—with which she regarded human nature in general. Her husband, when he reached America, at once wrote home to claim a share in the income secured by her settlement, which she accorded him without hesitation, moved by a certain gentle, unexpressed disdain. He received his allowance, as she termed it, or his share, as he called it, with unfailing regularity, and made a hundred ventures with it in the new field of speculation he had entered on with varying success. He gained money and he lost it afterwards as he moved about from one town to another; and sometimes in his letters he would tell her of his successes—

successes which made her smile. It was his nature, just as it was Mr. Baldwin's nature to take the chair at meetings, to devote himself to the interests of the denomination. The one tendency was no more elevated than the other, when you came to look into them, the student of human nature thought. Perhaps, on the whole, the commercial gambling on a small scale which occupied the ruined merchant was more honest than the other; for Burton thought of nothing but his own profit or gain, whereas Mr. Baldwin thought he was doing God a service. But this was not a comparison for a daughter, for a wife, to make.

And then Clara came back from her southern villa, a young mother, with a husband who was no longer her lover, and of whom she had become aware that he was growing old. The villa was situated on the shores of the loveliest sea, in the most beautiful climate in the world; but Clara tired of it, and found it dull, and with her dulness bored her husband so that his life became a burden to him. He brought her home at her urgent desire, with her baby, and they lived about in London for a short time, now in a hotel, now in a lodging, till it occurred to Clara that it was her duty to go and live near "dear grandpapa," and delight his old age with the fourth generation of his descendants. It suited her very well for a time. "Dear grandpapa" was abject to her; her aunts became slaves to herself and her baby; she became the centre of all their thoughts and plans. Clary, who loved all pleasant things, and to whom luxury and ease were life, made herself at home at Clapham; and Mr. Golden relieved her of his presence, paid visits here and there, lived at his club—which, strangely enough, had not expelled him—and returned to all the delights of his old bachelor life. What was to be the final end of it was hard to prophesy; but already Clary had begun to be bored at Clapham, and to make scenes with her husband when he paid her his unfrequent visits. And this was the love-match so romantically made! Clary, amid all her jealousies and all her dulness, kept so firm a hold upon the rich old people who could not live for ever, and who could restore her at their death, if they so pleased, to much of her old splendour, that her mother derived a certain painful amusement from this new manifestation of her life. Amusement, I cannot deny—and painful, I hope; seeing that the creature who thus showed forth to her once again the poor motives and self-seeking of humanity

was her only daughter. But with such evidences before her eyes of what human nature was, was it wonderful that Mrs. Burton should stand more and more by herself, and harden day by day into a colder toleration, a more disdainful acquiescence in the evils she could not fight against? What was the good of fighting against them? What could she do but render herself extremely unhappy, and spoil their comfort, without doing them any good? It was not their fault; they were acting according to their nature. Thus Mrs. Burton's philosophy grew, and thus she spent her diminished life.

It was in the midst of all these varied circumstances that the joybells rang for Norah's wedding. Mrs. Burton did not go; for even her philosophy was not equal to the sight of Dura, where, according to the wish of both bride and bridegroom, the bridal was; but Clara, eager in the dulness of Clapham for any change, was present in a toilet which filled her aunts with compunction, yet admiration, and which one of them had been wheedled into giving her. Clara took great state upon her as the matron, the only one of the party who had attained that glory, though she was the youngest, as she reminded them all. "But if I don't do better than Clary has done, I hope I shall never marry at all," Katie Dalton cried with natural indignation. The pretty procession went out of the Gatehouse on foot to the church behind the trees, where Norah, as she said, had been "brought up," and where Mr. Dalton blessed the young pair, while his kind wife stood holding Helen's hand and crying softly, as it were, under her breath. Helen herself did not cry; and Norah's tears came amid such an April shining of happiness, that no one could object to them. The whole village came out to watch the pair whom the whole village knew. A certain tenderness of respect, such as the crowd seldom shows, was in the salutations Dura gave to the son of the ruined man who had so long reigned among them. No one could remember, not the most tenacious rural memory, an unkind act of Ned's; and the people were so sorry for him, that their pleasure in his joy was half pathetic. "Poor lad!" they said; "poor fellow! And it was none of his fault." And the friendliness that brought him back to hold his high festival and morning joy of youth among them touched the kindly folks, and went to their hearts. Stephen Haldane sat at his window, and watched the bride come and go. Tears came in his eyes, and a pathetic mixture of gladness and

sorrow in his heart. He watched the procession go out, and in his loneliness folded his hands and prayed for them while they were in church. It was summer once more, and the blossomed limes were full of bees, and all the air sweet with scent and sound. While all the goodly company walked together to the kirk, Stephen, who could not go with them, sat there in the sunshine with his folded hands. What thoughts were in his mind! What broken lights of God's meaning and ways gleamed about him! What strange clouds passed over him through the sunshine—recollections of his own life, hopes for theirs! And when the bride went away from the door, away into the world with her husband—in that all-effectual separation from her father's home which may be but for a few days, but which is more or less for ever, Stephen once more looked out upon them from his window. And by his side stood Helen, escaped there to command herself and to console him. The father leaned out of the

window, waving his hand; but the mother stood behind, with her hand upon the arm of the invalid's chair. When Robert turned round, it was with wonder that he perceived in Stephen's eyes a deeper feeling, a more penetrating emotion, than he himself felt, or had any thought of. He held out his hand to his friend, and he put his arm around his wife.

"Well, Helen," he said, with his cheery voice. "She is gone as you went from your mother, and there are two of us still, whatever life may have in store."

"If there had not been two of us," the mother cried, with momentary passion, "I think I should have died."

Stephen Haldane took her hand in his, in sign of his sympathy. He held it tightly, swaying for a moment in his chair. And he said nothing, for there was no one whose care was his, to whom his words were precious. But in his heart he murmured, God hearing him, "There is but one of me; but I never die."

THE END.



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This striking story was originally published in England, under the name of "The Beggars" (*Les Gueux*). It is introduced into the Library of Choice Fiction, under the title of "Galama," that it may not be confounded with a narrative called "The Beggars," which appeared in this country several years ago.

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G A L A M A .

CHAPTER I.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW.

THE market-place of Brussels presented a dismal sight, when the sun of the 5th of June, 1568, rose upon that city. Before a large imposing edifice a scaffold was erected, upon which two of the principal nobles of the country, the Counts of Egmont and Horn, were to be beheaded. They were the sacrifices, by the blood of which the soil of the Netherlands was to be consecrated as the scene of one of the noblest struggles which the history of the sixteenth century records.

It was a struggle for the holiest and most precious concerns of man—religious and political liberty. The first defenders of these costly treasures, though a mere handful of people, were animated by an indomitable spirit of freedom, and strengthened by faith in the word of God, which, it is said, is the “victory that overcometh the world.” The adversaries whom they resisted were the greatest powers of the age—the Roman Pope, the Spanish King, and the powerful instruments of both, the terrible Inquisition. If ever priestcraft and despotism united cunning with force to crush a good cause, it was in this pertinacious contest, which lasted not less than eighty years. But it has been shown, too, in this contest, that even a small, weak nation may conquer the mightiest empires, if, united and harmonious, it is ready to lay down its life for the sake of liberty and truth.

The name of the Netherlands is at present only given to the kingdom of Holland. In the sixteenth century, however, that name indicated a cluster of provinces extending from the Zuiderzee and the Dollart, to the northern

frontiers of France, and forming that tract of fertile, alluvial land which is at present occupied by the two kingdoms of Holland and Belgium. These provinces were at the time of our story a portion of the dominion of the king of Spain, Philip II., who ruled them under the title of Count of the Netherlands, in which capacity he was named Philip III. He had inherited this property from his father, Charles V., and it undoubtedly was one of the finest portions of his extensive dominion.

By a gradual process of industry and intelligence, of bold and cautious speculation, the people of the Netherlands had at the end of the fifteenth century arrived at a state of prosperity second to none in the world. They were reckoned amongst the boldest navigators of their time. Their manufactures in velvet, in silk, in tapestry, and in linen were valued wherever they were known; and, strange to say, in a country for the greater part singularly destitute of romantic scenery, there was founded a school of painters inferior only to that of Rome. The prosperity of the inhabitants was proverbial. The wealth which they displayed in their houses and on their persons was so great, that a crowned visitor, when walking one day through the capital, exclaimed in astonishment, “that she could fancy herself surrounded by princes instead of simple burghers.”

No wonder, then, that Philip dreaded the loss of this rich part of his possessions as a great calamity. And for this dread there was indeed some ground. It is true, the Nether-

landers were as loyal subjects as he could desire them to be, for, though very jealous of their privileges, and ever trying to obtain freedom of self-government, yet the thought of renouncing their allegiance to the Spanish crown never occurred to them; nay, they were so far from it, that, not until Philip himself had in the most inhumane and reckless way torn asunder the ties which bound that faithful people to his throne, could they be brought to establish themselves as an independent nation.

But the light of the Reformation which had set Germany all ablaze, had also penetrated to these districts. Philip, who was as bigoted a papist as he was a cruel tyrant, foresaw that a separation between his house and the Netherlands would become inevitable, if he did not in time prevent the spread of the horrible heresy in these quarters. Much to his dismay, on his visit to this part of his dominion in 1559, he found that not only had the evil already made alarming progress, but that it was also of the worst kind; for the heresy which here prevailed was the Calvinistic or reformed, which was reported as being fraught with still stronger revolutionary and rebellious tendencies than was the Lutheran. In his anger, he resolved not to allow himself any rest until he had extirpated Protestantism, root and branch. He formed a scheme with the French king, Henry II., to massacre all heretics, whether high or humble, and thus to deliver the world of that "accursed vermin."

This plan was imprudently revealed to William, Prince of Orange, who was at that time a hostage at the court of the French king. From that moment dates the resolution of this noble prince to protect the innocent people of the Netherlands, even though it should cost him his life. This disposition of the prince, however, was not known to the king of Spain, else he would most assuredly not have appointed him as governor of the four wealthiest and most powerful of the Northern provinces; namely, Holland, Zealand, West-Friesland, and Utrecht.

The government of the whole country was intrusted to the king's sister, Margaret, Duchess of Parma, who was assisted by Cardinal

Granvelle and a council of the principal nobles, amongst whom, besides the Prince of Orange, the Counts of Egmont and Horn and the Baron Berlaime were most influential. Ere long, however, it was discovered that the king had resolved to carry on the government in his own way, and independent of the will of the country, as expressed by the estates and the council of nobles. In spite of all opposition, and in the face of all the rights and privileges possessed by the people, Cardinal Granvelle, the real governor, introduced the Spanish Inquisition. The persecution at once became virulent and general. The members of the Order of Jesus crept into every family, and fished out the most hidden secrets. The officers of the Inquisition, whose diabolical cruelties were often not even masked with an assumption of piety, siezed upon every one who bowed down in anything but abject submission; they strangled, burned, and imprisoned thousands of people; and yet even then there were to be found those who were bold enough to proclaim the pure gospel, and attack the errors of the Church, in the face of poverty, of life-long imprisonment, of death by hanging, by strangling, by flaying alive, by roasting alive, and by such exquisite forms of torture as kept their victims drooping and slowly dying often for the full space of thirty-six hours.

The people became uproarious. Even the Roman Catholics could not bear this. But popish bulls and excommunications were showered down upon the unhappy country. Imperial decrees were thundered forth, and were upheld and executed by troops who were paid from the wealth which the oppressor had principally screwed out of his victims. The fleets of trading vessels, formerly carrying merchandise to every port of the world, were now freighted with the fleeing merchants themselves, who, settling in Germany and England, transported to those countries their capital and their industry. The prisons, which were numerous and large, were filled with the innocent, while their proper occupants were allowed to go at large, provided they were poor, and could repeat an "Ave Maria." People suspected their nearest re-

lations, their own children, their wives, their husbands. No one dared to speak openly about religion, and only then in private, when, two or three being assembled in the name of Jesus, the oppressed heart could pour itself out, and be strengthened in Christian fellowship.

The nobles, who had never been accustomed to restraint, and had no idea of being thus overruled, became furious. The regentress (the Duchess of Parma) was overwhelmed with angry reproaches, with appeals, with threats. She was a soft-hearted woman, and she felt the invectives keenly; but she could not give them a satisfactory answer; for she could not tell these haughty nobles that the fault lay not with her, but with the king, and most of all, with the cardinal. They found it out themselves, however, and the Prince of Orange, who was looked up to as the first man in the country, and followed by all the people, turned bitterly upon this ecclesiastical assailant of their liberty. His removal from the provinces was demanded. At first the king preserved a cold and haughty silence; then he gave a kind but evasive answer. This, however, would not satisfy the nobles. They insulted and ridiculed the cardinal, they threatened the king, they spoke of revolt. The king grew furious, hurled back their threats with increased bitterness, but gave in at last, and the cardinal retired in the year 1564.

Great was the joy in the provinces at this event, and a golden age was now expected. It is true, it was found that the Inquisition had not departed with the cardinal. But now that he was away, the governess showed far greater leniency, and the persecution for a time almost ceased. The nobles and estates were once more convoked, the persecuted adherents of the Reformation again came forward, the fields swarmed with immense multitudes of people, who often walked many miles to listen to some pious preacher, and frequently carried their clubs and swords with them to defend him against attacks. The people revived; it was fondly hoped that at least freedom of religion would be allowed; that peace and good-will would

return amongst men; that happiness would once more reign amongst the loyal inhabitants of the Netherlands.

This was not to be. An event took place in August, 1566, which at once destroyed these hopes. It was that strange and hitherto not yet sufficiently explained outbreak of fanatical wildness which is known in the history of those days as the famous image-breaking. It seized upon the people—especially upon the lower classes—like a demon. Within four days not less than 400 churches, and everything they contained, were destroyed. The report of this riotous outrage set the king in a rage. He now resolved to renew the old persecutions with the utmost rigor. In August, 1567, he sent the Duke of Alva, at the head of 30,000 picked troops, to replace Granvelle. And now six years of misery ensued, the history of which is written with blood and tears. If the cardinal had been a whip, the duke was a scorpion. He was a great warrior and a great fanatic, quick of perception, decisive in action, firm of will, and neither afraid nor merciful. Philip never possessed a more devoted servant; the Pope, never a more bigoted subject; the Jesuits, never a fitter tool. Not a month elapsed before he was working at the head of the famous "Blood Council;" in another month the principal nobles and commoners had been seized, and imprisoned or beheaded; and as if that were only a prelude of what was to come, in six months he had passed a sentence of death upon *every inhabitant of the country*.

The people trembled. Whoever found it possible, sold his possessions, and left the country, even with the greatest loss and danger. Those who could not, bowed in silence under the yoke, and turned their eyes to the only man whom they knew to be able to help them, "THE PRINCE." But the Prince of Orange, one of the ablest and most profound statesmen of his time, knew the character of the king of Spain and of his regent, the duke, too well to expect any leniency from that quarter. Consequently, no sooner had he heard that Alva was coming, than he made his arrangements, and left the country five

months before the duke entered it. In vain he endeavored to convince the other nobles of the necessity of this step. In vain he pointed to the character of Philip and of Alva, to the threats they had already received, and the secret information he had gained as to their intentions. Few believed or heeded his warnings, and, accompanied by his brothers, he retired to his German possessions to await the fulfilling of his prophecies. It came even sooner than he had expected.

In the latter days of August, 1567, Alva entered Brussels. A fortnight afterward, the Counts of Egmont and Horn were invited to dine with him and some of the principal officers. Egmont was warned on all sides not to go; even at the dinner some one whispered into his ear, that he should flee; but he would not distrust his host. Half an hour after that warning, he and Count Horn were each imprisoned in a room guarded by soldiers; a few weeks afterward, they were conveyed to the castle of Ghent, where they remained for nine months, until they were led back to Brussels for their execution.

The consternation which the news of this arrest spread through the country, baffles all description. The two counts, and especially Egmont, whose brilliant military career in the war with France had made him the darling of the army, were much beloved and respected; and as their arrest was followed by that of many other prominent men, every one began to feel alarmed. The prince, who was in exile, whose goods were confiscated, most of whose friends were imprisoned, could do but little against the overwhelming forces of the duke. It is true, in the beginning of 1568, and about a month before the time in which our story commences, his brother, Count Louis, had gained a victory over the Spaniards in Friesland; but a few days after the victory, the hired troops, disappointed in their expectations of plunder, became mutinous, and the battle was unattended by any good results.

Thus, owing to the fanaticism verging upon madness of the king, the Prince of Orange was, both by the supplications of an ill-treated people and by the dictates of his own consci-

ence, induced to take the lead of an insurrection which soon assumed the form of a war. At first that war was only waged against the Duke of Alva and the other Spanish officials; it was not before thirteen years of this bloody struggle had elapsed, and Philip had publicly outlawed the prince, that the estate of the Northern provinces abjured the king himself. It may be easily imagined that the reasons which prompted the people to unite in this great contest were of a varied character; for, since the men who tried to extirpate the new religion, tried at the same time to keep the people in political slavery, the opposition was stimulated by political as well as religious motives. Some took up arms in defence of the preaching of the gospel, of the true service of God, of freedom of conscience; but many, and these probably formed the great number of the combatants, fought in defence of their political liberty and independence; while not a few were merely animated by the spirit of vengeance, or by covetousness and rapacity.

Thus a great number of men, some of them of very good families, who had been deprived of all they had in this world, formed themselves into guerilla bands, and, full of vengeance, attacked their enemies, the Spaniards and the priests, whom they looked upon as the principal cause of all the evil. They called themselves "Beggars," or "Gueux," the origin of which name will be explained in another chapter. Often these daring and, for the greater part, godless men did nothing but plunder, rob, and murder; but often, too, they rendered great service to the cause of liberty, by intercepting supplies and despatches destined for Alva. Some of them, too, were noble enough to undertake a task fraught with so many dangers, and having comparatively so little reward, that it is almost astonishing to read of the daring exploits of these heroes. They carried letters, written in cipher-language, or otherwise rendered unintelligible except to the initiated, between the prince, who was in Germany, and his correspondents in the provinces. Thus, to keep the prince informed of all that passed

in the Netherlands, these heroes risked their lives every hour of the day.

Soon after the victory of Count Louis in Friesland, it became known that the duke would march against Louis himself, at the head of Spain's picked troops. The people began to lose all hope, when another rumor, more appalling than the first, spread through the land. It was said that, before starting, the duke would witness the execution of the principal nobles, and, amongst them, of the two counts, Egmont and Horn. It was but too true. After a mock trial, conducted in a manner directly opposed to every law and statute, they were sentenced to death, transported from Ghent, under a strong detachment, and lodged in the Broodhuys at Brussels.

The news flew with lightning speed through the town and beyond it. The citizens seemed thunderstruck, and passed each other without speaking. The political horizon seemed to grow blacker and blacker. The towns and villages half empty—their noblest, wealthiest, most intelligent inhabitants either in exile, in prison, or leading a guerilla life—the people, and especially those who were inclined to accept the new religion, feeling the yoke of oppression heavier each day; it seemed indeed as if God had forsaken them. But He had resolved to make them go through yet greater tribulations, in order that they might come out pure as gold, and that the beginning of their freedom should come when they had lost everything but their faith in His power.

CHAPTER II.

TWO DECENT BEGGARS.

WAS it a thought of these troubles which clouded the brow of a young horseman, who was riding at a sharp trot through the forest of Soignés, which extends for many miles south of Brussels? From his appearance the contrary would have been expected; for he was dressed in the attire of a Spanish officer, and he was followed by a trooper of the army. His fair locks were covered with one of those costly and highly ornamented helmets, called *morions*, which the Spaniards copied from the Moors during their long wars with that people, and introduced into the European armies about the sixteenth century. An equally costly breastplate covered his chest, and though his legs and arms were left unguarded, the brace of pistols in his saddle and the formidable sword at his side, seemed sufficient to protect him in an age in which the lance and the battle-axe had long since gone out of date. His trunk hose and that part of his doublet which could be seen, were in keeping with his costly armor, and the embroidered leathern scarf which hung across his shoulders, as well as the hilt of the sword attached to it, showed that he could occupy no mean place in the Spanish army.

And yet his face looked anything but that of a Spaniard. His fair locks, his blue and expressive eyes, his cheeks which had been browned neither by the sun nor by the infusion of Moorish blood, his slim and erect stature, betrayed in him a child of the North. His thin and firmly set lips gave to his face an expression of determination. At times, when the deep thoughts with which he seemed occupied made him press them closer upon each other, and cause him to frown under his helmet, his features, though they spoke of scarcely more than a score of summers, wore an expression of sternness which made him look ten years older than he really was. He

rode his beautiful horse with perfect ease, but ever and anon he threw an anxious look at it, and patted it on the neck; for it gave signs of fatigue, and its blown condition was evidence of the long journey it had already made.

His companion was a man of a different stamp altogether. His short, stout body, his broad shoulders and powerful arms, would have marked him as belonging to a more common type, had not his inferior horse, the helmet or iron pot that covered his head, and the cuirass of a common soldier been sufficient to show it. And yet, when one looked at his face, one found a different expression there to the general look of dulness or ferocity common to the soldiers of those days. He wore a beard with a point, cut close at the cheeks, and revealing on the right cheek a frightful scar running from the mouth to the ear. It gave his face a weird appearance; but the smiling mouth and the gay light which danced in his black eyes redeemed its ugliness. On the whole, it was a face expressive of good humor, of fidelity, and of courage; and only now and then, when anger contracted his brow, could it be seen that that courage might upon occasion degenerate into ferocity.

It seemed as if his armor was not so well made as that of his master, or indeed it looked as if it had been made for some one else; for his cuirass, though it had been buckled closely, could not altogether inclose his broad chest, and the helmet, which seemed heavy, was continually pushed from one side of the head to the other.

He was blowing and puffing under this restraint, and sundry coughs and small remarks which he made indicated that he would not be in the least sorry, should his master rein in his horse and somewhat slacken his speed.

The youth, however, paid no attention to these hints, but, wrapped in thought, sat erect in his saddle, and heeded nothing around him.

The sun was already on its decline. Powerful though its rays still were, they could but seldom penetrate the thick foliage which sheltered the travellers, throwing only an occasional ray on the bad and dusty road, if such it could be called. The clatter of the horses, re-echoing through the wood, startled its inhabitants—the deer, the hare, the rabbit, and innumerable birds—out of their resting-places, and with a shrill screech or a swift movement they fled from the two men, to whom no idea was at that moment farther than pursuit. They had ridden for some time in silence, and the servant showed signs of increasing impatience, when that which he seemed unable to do, was effected by his master's horse. Perhaps not thinking of the condition of his steed, the youth spurred it. It made a dash forward, stumbled, and but for the skill of its rider would have fallen. A gleam of pleasure passed over the servant's face.

"We have made a good way already, Yonker, and they will not be fit for much more unless we spare them," he said, reining his horse.

"We must give them some water. Is there a place near?" asked the youth who had been addressed as Yonker, an abbreviation of "Jonkheer," the Dutch title of the descendant of a noble family. He had jumped off his horse, and was examining it carefully.

"A hundred yards from here is the 'Duke,' I think," answered the servant, smacking his lips in anticipation.

"Come on then," said the Yonker.

Proceeding at a slow pace, they presently arrived at a wretched hovel, where a strange mixture of a variety of colors upon a board acquainted the passer-by that this was the "Duke," where "man and beast could get a feast." As to the beasts, it seemed to be literally true; for in front of the house a happy family of pigs were holding a picnic under the shadow of the immense trees which surrounded the inn. Giving his horse to his servant, the youth, determined to convince himself of the truth of the first part of the inscription,

stepped inside a low and ill-furnished room, and desired to be served with a can of beer. The weather was very warm, and the beer tolerable, so that the Yonker drank with pleasure. Suddenly, however, he put down the goblet, started up, and ran to the door opposite to that which he had entered, through which came the sounds of an angry conversation, immediately followed by the clash of swords.

Entering the small yard, he saw his servant in the act of attacking a stranger, and he arrived just in time to prevent them from exchanging blows, as both had drawn their swords.

The servant had obeyed his master's command. Taking the two steeds to the yard at the back of the house, he was quickly engaged in refreshing them, a trough and some pails having been pointed out by the host for his use. As he was feeding them, and dashing the cold water over their feet, he began to sing, with a low voice, one of the many songs which in those days were the only literature the people possessed. It was one of the productions of the Guild of Rhetorics, or Rederykes, whose members, belonging to the middle classes, gave vent to their feelings and to public opinion in verses, generally of an inferior character, as regards the poetry, but by their biting sarcasm and irony infinitely more popular than were the more sublime literary productions of those times. The Rhetorics had for some time been forbidden to assemble, and it was highly dangerous to sing or repeat one of their songs within the hearing of any of Alva's partisans; but many spirited men, and especially the Beggars, took a secret delight in repeating them wherever they could, and copies of them were often found stuck up at the most conspicuous parts of a street or square. To give an idea of what they were, we append a translation of the song which the fellow was singing by his horses:

O Alva, who chills us,

O Alva, who kills us,

O Alva, who fills us

With rage and dismay:

The Beggars will shake you,
The prince will quake you,
The devil shall take you
Forever away !

The " Council " that pains us,
The king who disdains us,
The tyrant who chains us—
They can't live for aye ;
For God, He will aid us
To slay them that slayed us,
And drive them that flayed us
Forever away !

While humming this song between his teeth, his eyes fell upon a horse which was tied to a second trough in the corner of the yard. It was somewhat hidden behind the overhanging branches of a tree, but a noise which it made attracted his notice. He immediately saw that it could not belong to the inn, as its saddle and accoutrements showed that it was owned by a traveller, and that that traveller must be some one of tolerable wealth, if not importance.

He involuntarily stopped singing, and glanced around him to discover whether the owner of the horse was near, and might perhaps have heard his tune. He took this precaution too late, however. During the time that he had been busy with the animal, a man who stood at the back door of the inn, had regarded him with great attention, and a smile of satisfaction seemed to steal over his face when he heard the notes and words of the well-known Beggars' tune.

The stranger, though he was of the same age as the servant—that is too say, some thirty-five years old—was exactly his opposite in the build of his person. He was thin, tall, and sufficiently well-made to promise those who intended attacking him a tough resistance. His face, though it was surrounded by the same black beard and locks as those of the other, was quite of a different cast. It was long, bony, and decidedly striking. The high, narrow forehead, in which care had ploughed many a furrow ; the deep-lying and shining cat's eyes, which flew from one object to another with lightning speed, without expressing anything but perfect coolness and composure ; the hooked nose, the high cheek

bones, and the thin lips, made up an *ensemble* which could not fail to attract attention, though it would have been called unpleasant by many.

It seemed, at any rate, to make an unfavorable impression upon the Yonker's servant ; for when he had finished his survey, to which the other subjected himself with a complacent smile, he asked in a tone which clearly meant to be insulting :

" Well, my man, you seem mightily fond of a tune, that you are thus listening to me."

" Possibly so," answered the stranger ; " but I would advise thee, my good fellow, to moderate thy musical zeal somewhat, for even trees, thou knowest, have ears in these days ;" and he stepped out of the door, and approached the trough.

The servant looked at him from under his helmet, and his eyes shone dangerously. The words had been spoken in a calm and dignified manner, as if the speaker were accustomed to command, and were at that moment giving some reproof to his own servant. He answered nothing, however ; but taking up one of the pails, proceeded to throw some water over his horses. He saw that he had acted very imprudently, that probably the stranger was a Spaniard or a spy, and might bring him into trouble. His resolution was taken in a moment, and he coolly determined to pick a quarrel with the man, and rid himself of the danger. Thus, as the stranger was leisurely approaching, he put down the pail with a dextrous movement before his feet, in such a manner that he must either give it a kick, or stumble over it and fall. The stranger did the former, and sent the pail rolling over the yard.

" As sure as my name is Hans," said the servant, putting himself in front of the stranger, and feigning astonishment and rage, " what mean you by this ? Is it not enough that you take advantage of me in one way, that you must insult me also ?"

" Hold, my good Hans ! I did intend no injury for thee ; a timely warning is a useful thing, and surely the secret of thy Beggarship is quite as safe with me as with thyself. Nay, press not thus—I hate a needless quar-

rel; besides I never fight a servant when his master can be had. Stand off."

So saying, the stranger, who remained perfectly calm, gave the servant a push. But it was evident the latter desired to pick a quarrel, for he answered in sarcastic and angry tones. Ere long the two men had drawn their swords, and were about to enter upon a combat, when the youthful master appeared on the scene, and placed himself between the two parties.

"What in the name of our Lady is happening?" he asked. "What are you doing, Hans?"

The two men dropped their weapons and turned toward the speaker.

"He was nearly preventing one of your best friends from appearing at the Rookery to-night," said the stranger, addressing the Yonker.

The latter looked at his servant, and again at the stranger, with a certain degree of astonishment expressed on his face.

The stranger proceeded: "Hans might have spared his energies for a foe worthier of his skill and power than I am."

Master and servant interchanged a rapid glance.

"You seem to know my servant, friend?" said the Yonker, coolly.

"And you, too, Yonker," said the stranger, bowing slightly. "Peter Blink, did not give me his detailed description in vain. I think I am not mistaken in believing that I address Yonker Karel Galama; I would know him were he to travel a hundred times under the disguise of a Spanish officer."

This latter part of his speech was said so softly that the whisper was not heard by the host or his wife, who stood at some distance, looking with wonder at the scene. The youth, who had been addressed by the name of Galama, stood for some moments irresolute, as if he found it difficult to determine in what light to regard this new-comer. He scanned him closely from head to foot, a test which the latter stood with perfect composure. At last, seeming somewhat assured by his investigation, Galama said:

"You spoke of Blink just now. Explain yourself. Do you know him?"

"Perhaps this scrap will explain better than I can do," said the stranger, putting his hand in his vest, and pulling out a little roll of paper tied round with a bit of silk. The Yonker opened the paper, and read in old Gothic characters the following, while Hans looked over his shoulder:

"The bearer is to my knowledge a good assistant. He can use the steelyard very well, and is quick at ciphers. You can trust him. His name is Gerard Bock. God speed you.

"PETER BLINK."

"Your name, I perceive, is——?" said Galama, looking up from the paper after he had perused it.

"Gerard Block," said the stranger, bowing politely.

"Gerard what?" said Hans, making a movement as if to press upon the stranger, from which he was restrained by his master.

"Gerard Block," answered the stranger, when the Yonker also repeated the question. "Does it not say so in the letter?"

"It does not," answered Galama; "the name mentioned here is Bock."

"That must be a mistake," said the stranger. "I think I was baptized Gerard Block in St. Nicholas' Church, Amsterdam. At least, so says my mother."

"I do not think you should have been either baptized or born," grumbled Hans, giving his helmet a push to one side.

"I am not astonished at Peter Blink's making a mistake," said Galama; "for he never was very much of a writer."

"Ah, but, Yonker, an / takes a long time in making," said Hans; "and if it were a mistake, why did *he* not see it before? Surely he has read the letter." And he pointed to the stranger.

The latter bit his lips; and, as if he had not heard Hans's words, he said:

"It seems strange to me, because Peter has known me for such a long time, and is generally very careful. I am glad, however, that I have further proofs in my possession, which will convince you of my friendly intentions."

He again put his hand into his doublet, and pulled out a blue silk ribbon which hung

round his neck. At the end of it was attached a little brass medal, on one side of which was stamped the image of Philip, the sovereign of the provinces, and on the other a Beggar's wallet, with the inscription around it: "*Fideles au roy jusqu'à la besace*" (Faithful to the king even to beggary).

The young nobleman looked at the medal, and smiled as he said in a tone in which every trace of distrust seemed to have vanished—

"That alone, Master Block, would make us friends. I am curious, however, to know how you found me out, and why you are here. But the hour is getting late. Go inside, and finish your beer, Hans, and then let us be away. I suppose you are going our way, if so, we can become closer acquainted on our ride," he continued, turning to the stranger with a courtesy and a manliness which showed that, though young, his charac-

ter had to a great extent been already formed by the experiences of his life.

"Humph!" muttered Hans, as he took his way slowly inside, where a can of beer awaited him, "I don't half like that fellow. Block! Block! Block! They do sound a good deal like each other, and yet there's difference enough for Peter to stumble over. And then he wore a coat of mail; that's queer. I do not remember ever seeing any of us with one. It's too heavy, and not strong enough. I will keep an eye on him, that I will. The Yonker is no good for looking about him. He has not got my eye, by a long way, but he's always thinking, thinking, thinking."

He finished his beer, and, returning to the yard, found the two men already mounted. He jumped on his horse, and after some moments the clatter of hoofs was dying away in the distance.

CHAPTER III.

AN ODD TRICK.

"AND what was the cause of this deadly quarrel?" said Karel Galama to the stranger, when they had for some moments been riding in silence.

"Upon my word, I do not know," answered Gerard Block.

"In these unhappy days, the cause seems to be often forgotten, so the result be but pleasing."

"Have you been picking a quarrel again for your own amusement?" said Galama, turning sternly to Hans, who was riding on his right. "How many times have I told you that your noisy behavior will do us more harm than good!"

"Well, what is a man to do, Yonker," answered Hans, doggedly, "when he is singing a Beggar's ditty, and some lean, ill-looking —, I beg your pardon, when some stranger stands by and watches you? I could not run him through with my sword at once, so the only thing I could do was to pick a quarrel, and do it. And I do not know but that it would have been best," he added softly.

"Silence!" said his master, frowning. "You must not sing your ditties anywhere, least of all where strangers can hear you; do you understand? Then turning to the stranger, he said, "I am grieved that your introduction to me should have been in so unpleasant a manner."

"Nay, Yonker," interrupted Block, "do not excuse. I cannot but admire the conduct of your servant, though it endangered my person. If I had been in the same position, I dare say I would have acted like him. I confess it was somewhat careless of him to sing or even to hum that song; for, had I not been as determined a patriot as I am, I might easily have become suspicious. As it was, however, he kept to his word, and but

for your help might have done away with me forever."

"You are very humble, Master Block, as to your own abilities in the art of defence," said the Yonker, smiling. "You look as if you had seen something of the world, and could call this neither your first nor your tenth quarrel. Have you belonged to us long?"

"I have been a friend of the prince ever since I can remember," said Block, "and I wore his badge at the time that Count Brederode was at Amsterdam. I think I had the pleasure of seeing one of your family with him; at least, a nobleman of the name of Galama was his constant companion."

"I know," answered Galama, in a gloomy tone; "both my uncles were beheaded yesterday or the day before, unless some miracle has happened; for I heard that Alva commanded that they and six other nobles should be hanged."

The stranger looked at the youth with some astonishment. "And are you nevertheless going to Brussels yourself?" he asked; "for I presume that your way lies thither."

"Where duty calls us, we can have no choice," answered Galama. "But you seem to be pretty well known in the environs of this city."

"I should think so," answered Block. "I was born in Brussels, and I left it only a few days before the duke entered it."

"Halloo! that's wrong, master," said Hans, looking across his master's horse to the stranger; "you said just now that you were in Amsterdam when Count Brederode was there, and now you say you were in Brussels just before Alva came there. There is not more than a week between the two events."

Block bit his lips. He evidently disliked Han's familiarity; but he saw that he must

give some explanation; so he said, in a haughty tone—

"There are nearly four months between them; and Peter Blink advised me to return to Brussels, and sell all I had, before Alva came; which very good advice I followed, and thus saved a greater part of my slender fortune."

"How did you become acquainted with Peter?" asked Galama. "To judge by the manner in which you speak of him, he must be an old intimate friend of yours."

"We did get acquainted in rather a peculiar manner," said Block, after a moment's pause, "and I suppose the recollection of it will not vanish from our memories very soon. It was about the time that the Inquisition and Granvelle were in the zenith of their power, that somehow or other our family became an object of suspicion. We were living in Long Lane, where I, my mother, and my sister occupied a house, and my skill in the art of embellishing with gold, silver, and ivory, procured us a very comfortable living."

"Was your father not alive then?" asked Galama.

He died in the siege of the city of St. Quentin," continued Block; "but as I was already grown up, and knew my trade, there was little difficulty caused by his death. But one day a priest brought me a crucifix, which he desired me to ornament with ivory and gold, according to a peculiar pattern. I fulfilled his command; but he never returned, so that I was obliged to sell the cross for what I could get for it. A few days after the sale some unknown person asked me whether I had ever decorated a cross of such a design. I acknowledged that I had, upon which he told me that it was a most blasphemous design, being a sentence written in some language I did not understand. I told him it was made to order; but having lost the piece of paper, I could not prove this. The person went away; but that same night I was seized in the road, and would have been carried away, but for Peter's timely interference, who put my assailants to flight, and enabled me to reach home. I packed all my money and clothes together, and left the city that same night."

"And did your mother carry on the business?" asked Hans, in an interested tone.

Block shot a glance of ire at the servant, and addressing himself to Galama, continued: "The next day my mother and my sister were seized, and if they have not since died, they are still lingering in prison, suffering for a crime which they know not."

"Oh, I see," said Hans again, with the most persevering suspiciousness; "I thought you said that you returned to Brussels just before Alva left it, in order that you might sell your all. If your people were seized, and you took your things away with you, you could not have much left."

"My work-place and my valuable stock-in-trade I gave to a friend to take care of, and he pleased my customers so well, that he fared better than I did. I always had a longing to go back to my native city, and when I did so, my friend most generously gave me half the value of the business."

"I suppose you were born in Brussels, were you not?" asked Hans, somewhat more politely. But Block seemed to dislike his questions thoroughly. He frowned, and shooting another glance of anger at the servant, he said to Galama—

"I do not know what may be his object. Yonker; perhaps it is spite; but your servant seems determined to persecute me with silly and unimportant questions."

"Not I, Master Block, not I," said Hans, spurring his horse; "only, you know, you said you were christened at St. Nicholas' Church, Amsterdam, and so if you were born in Brussels you must have taken to travelling very early."

"Thou seemest to know amazingly little of the state of the country to think that would be impossible; nor, I believe, does the Yonker share thy ignorance. I would advise thee to wait therefore till thou hast a trifle more experience. At any rate, molest me no longer, or I shall feel compelled to continue my way alone as heretofore."

"Ha!" said Hans, not heeding Block's resentment, "there is another thing I wanted to say. I do not think Peter Blink was ever inside Brussels in his life."

"Come, Hans," said the Yonker, sternly, "hold thy tongue, and give vent to thy feelings at some other time and place. I feel for you, Master Block, for I too have lost a father through this cursed Inquisition. Accept my hand as a token that I have that sympathy for you which your misfortunes command."

Kind though the words were, the tone in which they were spoken was not very warm, and the hand which Block grasped was not offered with great enthusiasm. Though he would not confess it, it was plain that Galama had quite as much suspicion as his servant; but possessing more tact than the latter, he had resolved upon his own line of conduct. He therefore bade his servant ride a little in advance, and began a conversation with Master Block, in which he showed himself exceedingly versed in the art of evading answers, of asking questions, and of getting as much information as he could from his companion without imparting more than he chose. But his dexterity seemed almost thrown away upon Block, who was perfectly frank and good-natured, and showed not the least reluctance in telling all about himself, his connections, and his deeds, in all of which he did not spare either the duke or the Church.

They had thus been riding for some hours, and the conversation, which owing to their brisk pace was rather broken, had ceased for some time. The sun was gradually sinking in the west, and above their heads, through the green foliage, could be seen the rosy hue of the clouds. The multitude of birds, whose voices had enlivened the sombre silence of the forest with an endless variety of song, began to prepare themselves for rest. Suddenly Hans rode beside his master, and whispered something to him.

"Oh, yes," said Galama, awakening out of his reverie, "we must halt here. It will be dusk in an hour, and then we shall want our horses doubly. Will you halt too?"

Gerard nodded assentingly, and presently the three men pulled up before an inn which had all the appearance of prosperity, and differed greatly from the one at which they had stopped before. It was a large house, standing in the middle of a spacious yard, in which

were five or six troughs. Our travellers soon dismounted, gave their horses to a man, and entered a large room, the oaken floor of which was neatly strewn with white sand, while the plastered walls and the small but clean windows, as well as the luxury of a few chairs in addition to the benches round the table, gave the place an appearance of comfort. The stout and contented-looking landlord stood in the middle of the room, and gave Galama and Hans a smile of recognition, as they seated themselves at a table under one of the windows. Wine was ordered, and in a few moments the three men were refreshing themselves with the cool and delicious beverage, which was in those days far commoner and cheaper than it is now.

"And do you really intend going to Brussels to-night, Yonker?" asked Block.

"I do not know whether I shall go there to-night," answered Galama; "I shall go there some day this week, but it depends upon circumstances when. What is your plan, if I may ask?"

"Well, to say the truth, I came down here principally to help the Beggars with my knowledge of the city, and with the information which I have been able to pick up. I think of going to the town first, and then to the Rookery."

"Do you know the Rookery?" asked Galama, somewhat astonished.

Before Block could answer, the bark of a dog was heard at the back of the inn, and a woman's voice bidding it be silent. Immediately thereupon the landlord entered the room, and approached the table.

"I beg a thousand pardons," he said, giving at the same time a mysterious nod to Galama; "but that dunce of a stable-boy of mine does not know what to do with the horses. Would you mind going to see? for I am afraid there's something wrong with one of them."

"Indeed!" said Block, jumping up, and running to the door. "I would not have any harm befall my horse for a hundred ducats;" and he ran round to the stables, followed by Hans, who was grinning within himself.

No sooner had they left than the host turned toward the back door of the apartment, and whispered, "I will tell him."

The next moment a tall form, wrapped in a cloak, and covered with a wide-leaved, loosely shaped felt hat, of a dark color, entered, and going up to Galama, grasped him by the hand very cordially, saying:

"Welcome, thou intrepid messenger of our prince. What news from him?"

The speaker had thrown back his mantle, and taking off his hat he revealed a head which was exceedingly well formed, and as dignified in its expression as it was aristocratic. A high and lofty forehead, large and intelligent eyes, a pleasant mouth, a brown mustache and peaked beard, were its principal features. He was very plainly dressed, and his tawny leather doublet, his wide-slashed underclothes, and his shoes with steel buckles would have made him known as an artisan or respectable burgher, had not the magnificent hilt of his sword, and a beautiful signet ring of pure gold on his finger, indicated a higher rank. There was courage, determination, but, above all, thoughtfulness, expressed in the whole of his face and bearing; and by the side of Galama, in the very manner in which they walked toward each other, one could see the difference between the calm and experienced soldier, and the youthful and enthusiastic volunteer. He was William de Blois, Seigneur de Treslong, one of the foremost amongst the presenters of the "Request," and destined to become a great leader in the struggle.

"I know no more of him than you do, my lord," said Galama. "I have been hanging about Ghent for the last month, trying to find some means to liberate the counts, but two nights ago they were taken away. I suppose you know that they are in Brussels at this moment."

"Rather; and they have taken lodgings with a very good acquaintance of yours, Yonker. They are in the Broodhuys," answered Treslong.

"So I have been informed," said Galama; "but I could hardly believe it. I have, however, come hither on the strength of the re-

port. We each owe the duke a new grudge now, my lord."

Treslong's brother had been one of the nobles beheaded at the same time as the two Galamas.

"Ah, my poor brother," sighed Treslong, "I wonder when I shall follow him. And poor Adolphus of Nassau is dead, too."

"Not hanged, surely?" said Galama, quickly, and with something of terror in his tone. "The duke would never dare to do that."

"I dare say he would *dare*," said Treslong. "but he has not had the chance. Adolphus fell at Heiliger Lee, fighting against Aremberg—that renegade. But whom have you with you? and what do you propose doing?"

"As to what I shall do, now that you, too, tell me that the counts are in the Broodhuys, I shall go there to-night, and see Agnes. It is quite possible that between us we may hit upon some scheme for the liberation at least of Egmont. I am willing to risk my life, my everything, in the attempt, were I to be flayed for it to-morrow. I need not ask you whether you will aid me, my lord; but, think you, are your Beggars willing?"

"Karel," said Treslong, earnestly, "most of these men are vagabonds, I confess; but not one of them would hesitate a moment to begin the most perilous undertaking if there was a chance of freeing Count Egmont. But you who have shown yourself so valuable to the prince, do not risk your life in going into the city to-night, where all but certain death awaits you."

"My lord," answered Karel, rapidly, "it is by the express wish of the prince that I am engaged in this—"

He paused. A loud shouting outside made both look out of the window. They saw Hans seated on a horse which was rearing and plunging most wildly, and eventually threw him on the soft grass which grew at the side of the house. The landlord and the inmates of the house were standing by, laughing heartily at the ludicrous sight. As the two men looked at him with a smile, the face of Block appeared at the back door. He

threw a hasty but intense look at Treslong, and immediately pulled back his head. The next moment he came running into the yard, laughing heartily, and holding another horse by the bridle.

"I have dedicated my life to my country and to glory," said Galama, turning away from the window. "I hope that I may be engaged in the most dangerous, the most care-requiring expeditions, and I shall be content to die the most miserable and inglorious of deaths, if I could thereby further our most holy cause, one finger's breadth. You see that I am determined to count no dangers, and as to my getting into the city, am I not a Spanish officer?—and moreover read this;" and he handed the other a paper from under his cuirass. It was a despatch from the governor of Ghent Castle to the duke, having no interest for our readers.

"How did you get your disguise, and this?" asked Treslong, having read the despatch, and handing it to Galama.

"Hans procured these," said the Yonker, "though I am afraid their possession has been gained by blood. It is a very valuable thing to me, and cleverly got, too. Will you be at the Rookery to-night? for I shall go there as soon as I have seen Agnes. Then we can take counsel what is to be done, for I do not suppose Alva will wait long for their execution."

"I hear it will be in three or four days' time," said Treslong; "so we have not much time to lose. I came down here in consequence of your message, and I shall return to the Rookery, where all the Beggars are to be to-morrow night. But who is that stranger?"

"I do not know him very well. A certain Gerard Block, recommended to me by Peter Blink. He accidentally fell in with us on the road. He seems to know Brussels and the Rookery well, and he is a Beggar. He may be of some use to us. He thinks of going to Brussels first, and then on to the Rookery."

"Oh, but he must not go to Brussels to-night," said Treslong. "Three of you are too many to enter a city at night. Tell him

to stay here, and I shall keep an eye on him. He's a good horseman, whatever he is."

"I can't give him any command yet," said Galama, "as he has not put himself under our control. Besides, there is little harm in Hans's going with you to the Rookery, and he with me to Brussels. I must have some one as servant, you know, being a Spanish officer. We can't be certain yet of his faithfulness, and therefore I took care to see you alone; but I have told him nothing, so he can do no harm. Here he is coming. Away with you. Till to-morrow night then."

Treslong flung his cloak over his shoulder, put on the felt hat, and had just slipped out of the back-door, when Gerard Block, followed by Hans, entered the front.

"I have given your servant a lesson in riding, Yonker," said Block, smiling.

"I never saw such a brute in my life," said Hans, rubbing his shoulder, with a scowl. "But I managed him at last."

"Since you are going to Brussels, Master Block," said Galama, "we had better go together, and after having done our business, meet somewhere in the city, say at the corner of the Nassau Palace. Then we can go to the Rookery, and give our respective experience. I just thought it would be rather suspicious for three men on horseback to enter the gates after sunset: but now you can pass for my servant."

"Which I will be honored to call myself, Yonker," said Block.

"Then, Hans, you must remain till we are gone, and go to the Rookery alone. If you should be there ere we return, which will not be before to-morrow night, tell the guards that we are coming. And take care you do not become uproarious again;" and the horses being brought round at that moment, he stepped outside.

"Here, good Hans," said Block, mounting his horse, and holding out a ducat to Hans, "drink my health, and never ride a spirited horse again."

Hardly had he said these words, when his horse began rearing and plunging in the same manner as it had done with Hans, who

stood by his master's horse, grinning from ear to ear.

Block, however, was quicker than Hans had been ; and jumping out of the saddle, he began adjusting the straps. A moment after-

wards he remounted, and rode off with Galama in the direction of Brussels.

And Hans, who looked after them, shook his head and said, "Block ! Block ! I don't like him at all."

CHAPTER IV.

TWO CONVERSATIONS.

WE shall anticipate the swiftness of the two horsemen, and enter the city of Brussels by the Coudenberg Gate. The beauty of the evening seems to have failed in calling forth from the citizens any expression of enjoyment, and the poetic feeling which it is wont to inspire even in the dullest souls, has left their troubled spirits quite untouched. The city, formerly so gay about this time, is almost silent. The troops of girls or young men, who with noisy merriment used to patrol the streets, the knots of burghers who then stood talking to each other in the doors of their houses, and discussed with pleasure or pain their past, present, and future affairs—they are no more. Troops of soldiers fill the beer-houses, or make the streets echo with their Spanish, German, or Walloon songs. Here or there a group of men are talking in hushed tones, with grief or anxiety expressed upon their faces; or some proud priest, who views with satisfaction the submission into which the haughty city has at last been frightened, paces about like a conqueror.

What a difference to Brussels thirty years before! It was then, too, the seat of the government, the place where the nobles congregated, where the wealthiest, the most beautiful, and the most learned of the nation met. A day scarcely passed without some great feast being given, or the squares and outside the town being thronged with the free and thriving burghers, shooting with the cross-bow or playing at quoits. But perhaps the life then was too careless, too gay, and needed the heavy hand of God to make the people consider.

As we enter the gates, and follow the road, a sudden turning brings us in front of the Nassau Palace. It is a noble building, the property of the Nassau family for ages; but having now been forsaken by the Prince of Or-

ange, on his flight to Germany, it is confiscated by the duke, and all its costly furniture has been sold or taken away. It was formerly the *rendezvous* of the principal and most influential nobles. All that was talented, or distinguished by bravery and wisdom, had free access, and in those rooms many schemes had been discussed, many plans projected, and many wise measures taken, in order somewhat to counterbalance the influence of the cardinal and his evil companions. Turning to the right, we find ourselves in a square, called the Sablon, where, on one side, the famous Culemburg Palace rears itself. It is at present being destroyed by the orders of Alva, who, furious about the defeat of his troops, intends to annihilate around him all traces of the yet living spirit of national independence. It was there that, two years ago, the nobles congregated, at the request of its owner, Count Brederode, the handsome but reckless descendant of the old counts of Holland; and it was from the doors of that mansion that they started their memorable procession to the duchess. It was in one of its rooms, too, that, a few days afterwards, the celebrated banquet took place, at which the order of the Beggars was instituted. Its massive blocks of stone, its handsome halls, are now being demolished. Ere long a pillar of triumph shall mark the place where it stood.

A broad and spacious street leads from thence to the castle, the seat of the duke's government, and the place where he resides. *There is life, there is gaiety.* Bustle and business are going on in the square in front of the castle. Soldiers are running hither and thither; officers, with an air of native Spanish dignity and *hauteur*, or of French liveliness, are pacing up and down, or chatting gayly in groups. They do not care for the suffering

of the inhabitants; they have their pay, or what is equivalent to it, credit; and they justly reason that the less leniency they show the longer will be their stay.

"And so, Pierre," says one officer, who belongs to a group of captains; "you think we shall have to march in a few days. How do you always get hold of your information?"

"Don't you know, *garçon*," answers another, "he confesses to the priest, and in return he gets all the gossip and news the holy man has got hold of?"

"Bah!" says a third; "I hope Pierre is not so silly as to go confessing."

"Well," says a fourth, somewhat earnestly; "it is unmistakably an easy way to get rid of sins."

"Especially if you give the priests half of your spoils," said the second speaker.

"Pooh! I don't believe in them at all," said the third, "since I read that little book of Erasmus on them. He calls them the dogs that ought to eat the crumbs, but have climbed on to the table, and stolen other dishes.

"Now I cannot understand this," said the one who had been addressed as Pierre; "we are sent down here, and we are paid in order to uphold the Roman Catholic religion, and the Pope, and all that sort of thing, and I am blessed if every one of you is not a worse Catholic and a greater heathen than these poor people, take whom you like."

"Oh, that's nothing," said an old German veteran, who had seen many a battle; "I used to belong to a Saxon regiment; and, some twenty years ago now, we were ordered by the Emperor Charles to march into Guelderland, and help the priests in punishing those who would not bow down before the host. But the lark was, that half of us were Lutherans ourselves, and helped the people instead of the priests."

There was a general laugh at this, when a heavy coach was drawn up to the door of the castle, and a lady descended. She was magnificently though sombrely dressed, and her beautiful and noble face was deadly pale.

"Who is that, Schwabel?" asked one officer of the veteran who had saluted the lady as she passed quickly into the house.

"The Countess of Egmont,"* answered he, gloomily. "Heigho," he continued, "I served under him at St. Quentin; and, traitor or no traitor, I would rather have him free again than keep a single priest or inquisitor about us. May God help her, I say."

The captains were silent, and looked up at the window where they knew Alva was. They also knew that the countess's visit would be in vain.

Such were the men which the Roman Catholic Church employed as a means to bring back its erring sheep. Most of them had forsaken it themselves, and were of no religion at all; some even had secretly adopted the reformed one which they were employed to put down. It may be imagined, however, that their hearts had little to do with that religion, as they could continue serving such a master as Philip, and for such a purpose.

But let us turn away. We have a better visit to make. Following the road, we come at last to a great square—"The Square" of Brussels. On one side stands the town-hall, a fine old building; on the other, between the spires of the Church of St. Nicholas and the meat-house, stands the Broodhuys. It has a costly and highly ornamented façade, with all manner of quaint figures in stone, and five rows of windows embellished in rich garlands. It is an old building, and was formerly used as a bread-market, but having been altered and almost rebuilt, it is now used by different corporations or guilds for their assemblies, and often, too, did the estates and nobles hold their meetings in its spacious halls. Two of its rooms are at present used as prisons for the two counts. Two broad flights of stairs, one on each side the door, give access to the great hall, which, as well as the stairs and their vicinity, is full of soldiers. We shall, however, enter by the lower door which leads to the ground floor of the house, the apartments of which are occupied by the warder and his servants. Following the corridor, which is crossed about the middle by another at right angles, leading by a stair to the hall,

we find a door in front of us, and one on each side, giving access respectively to a little lane at the back, the private kitchen, and the sleeping apartment of the daughter of the warder, Agnes Vlossert.

The latter was but a little room, and wanted many of those ornaments which betrayed the devout Roman Catholic; and though it had not even the little crucifix, without which no room in those days was reckoned complete, it was yet tastefully and neatly arranged, and the gentle touches of a woman's hand were easily distinguished. The spotless curtains around the bed and on the window, the little bits of ornaments and finery on the chimney, and the beautiful flowers on a little table before the window, are all tastefully arranged. Strange to say, on such a beautiful evening the window is shut, and the rosy light of the departing sun, as it is reflected by the clouds, has to find its way into the little room through some fifty small panes of glass set in lead.

And yet, the two girls who were sitting in the room do not seem to be desirous of having the window open. They are engaged in conversation. In those days, conversation between lay people upon any subject was dangerous, and all precautions were taken against being overheard. There is but little difference of age between them, and a certain family likeness in the otherwise very dissimilar faces betrays their relation to each other. One of them is sitting upright, and supporting with one arm the figure of the other. Her features are noble, without being hard. Her eyes shine with feeling and intelligence, and the look which ever and anon she throws upon the other girl is so full of affection and tenderness, that they fully redeem a certain expression of sternness which their conversation seems to have called up. The other girl, who is apparently an invalid, leans upon her friend as much out of physical weakness as natural timidity. She, too, is beautiful, but it is a different beauty. She is the sister of Karel Galama; but the determination, the haughtiness, the enthusiasm which are expressed on her brother's face, are not to be found on hers. There are the same fair locks and blue eyes, denoting a Frisian de-

scend, but the whole cast of face is indicative of gentleness, of timidity, and even fear. Her cheeks are pale, and the little flush upon them shows that health is either slowly returning or slowly vanishing.

Both of them were orphans; but Agnes Vlossert had lost a treasure which to a girl can never be replaced. Some four years ago her mother died; and thus forced early to act and think for herself, she has already had many a hard trial. But it had been for her good. Her father, the warder, who had the management of the whole house, for which purpose a set of domestics were under his control, had naturally but little time to look after her, and she thanked God many a time afterwards that just then she had made the acquaintance of an apostle of Calvin, a certain Wouter, or Walter Barends, who was preaching in the neighborhood. She listened with intense interest to the words of grace which he preached, and accepted the glorious truths which he held out to her, with delight. Her mother being dead, she begged her aunt, the Baroness Galama, who was living at Brill, to allow Maria, her cousin, to pay her a visit; and as the times were yet comparatively peaceful, and no apprehension of Alva's coming agitated the minds of the people, her request was granted; the more because Karel, her brother, had been sent to the neighboring University of Louvain to complete his studies, and brother and sister would thus be near each other. It was not long ere Agnes, whose heart and soul were full of her new faith, induced Maria to accompany her to the house where Walter Barends preached, and she too began to doubt the truthfulness of that faith in which she had been educated. They were also frequently visited by Karel, and by his two uncles, the brothers Galama, whose company, however, little contributed towards confirming them in their new opinions, since the three gentlemen, though advocating the good cause of liberty, heart and soul, had not as yet found that true liberty wherewith Christ makes His disciples free.

While Maria's mind was yet unsettled, Alva suddenly appeared in the country. The

two uncles and other noblemen were imprisoned or executed: many of those who had congregated and worshiped with her and Agnes were seized by the Inquisition, which had now recovered its old blood-thirstiness, and were burned or hanged often before their eyes. To crown all, her brother's name was mentioned as one of the most determined Beggars, and the warder hinted that he would like to see Maria return to Brill. She, too, wished to return, but the events had made too deep an impression upon the simple girl, who had never been outside the little seaport of Brill. She fell into a fever, from which she had only a fortnight since recovered. It is she who is leaning against Agnes, and listening to her words with earnestness.

A little book is open on Agnes's knee. It is a New Testament, which was then recently translated into the Dutch language by Liesseldt.

"Yes, it is true," said Maria, in a pensive tone. "I cannot deny it. But still—"

"No 'buts,' dear, where the word of God speaks," said Agnes, laying her hand upon the open book. "You see it is clearly stated that the blood of our Lord Jesus *alone* cleanses us of all our sins."

Maria was silent. She took the book, and looked again at the text which her cousin had read to her.

"No priest can take away our sins," said Agnes, animatedly. "Jesus alone can do it."

"Ah, but mind," said Maria, "our good Lord has ordained the priests to administer forgiveness of sins in His stead."

"No, dear; you are mistaken. I have searched the Word of God from the first to the last page, but I have nowhere found such a statement."

"But hasn't our good Lord given the keys of heaven to Peter? And isn't the Pope Peter's successor? And hasn't he called and appointed the priests? and haven't they consequently the power to lock us in or out, and—?"

"No, dear; that's altogether erroneous," said Agnes, turning up the passage of Scripture referring to Peter. "You see that it is not merely to him, but in fact to all His dis-

ciples, that Jesus gives the authority of proclaiming remission of sins in His blood. And as to the power of opening and shutting the gates of heaven, listen to what the Lord says in the Revelation of John: "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore; and I have the keys of hell and death, and I have the key of David. I am He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth."

There was a pause. The words evidently made a deep impression upon Maria.

"The priests are but sinful men like us," Agnes continued. "They have no power to take away their own sins, much less those of any one else. No one but Jesus can do it, dear. To Him we must go, and not to the priest. Believe on Him; give up your heart to Him, and you are saved—your sins *are* remitted unto you."

"Oh, but, Agnes, do you know what you are saying?" said Maria. "It is so fearful!"

"Fearful!" Agnes exclaimed, her eyes beaming with enthusiasm. "Fearful!" she repeated, folding her hands on her lap, and staring Maria in the face, with an expression of utter astonishment. "How can you say such a thing, darling? Can anything give greater cause for rejoicing than to have free access to Jesus Himself, than to receive from His own word the assurance of the perfect forgiveness of sins. What is true peace, if it isn't that? That is salvation and unspeakable blessedness."

"Oh, certainly," Maria answered, a little taken aback by her cousin's ardor; "but I did not mean that. I meant that the consequences of adopting the new religion are so fearful. If the priests had heard all you have been saying just now, I am certain that you would be a child of death. I shudder at the thought."

And while saying these words she covered her face with both hands, and a shiver of horror thrilled through her frame.

"Yes, these are sad and heavy times," said Agnes, "and may the Lord give us wisdom to walk prudently. But it would be more fearful still if we denied Jesus before men. He would be sure to deny us before His

Father and His angels. We might escape the temporal death, but the everlasting one would surely become our lot."

"But we need not deny Jesus, need we?" said Maria. "The priests do not require us to deny that Jesus is mighty to forgive our sins." "True; but they require us to kiss the crucifix, and to worship the Virgin Mary and the saints, and to kneel down before a wafer, and to believe that there is a power of salvation in all these things. And to believe this is to deny Christ."

"Yes, you are right," sighed Maria. "It is distinctly said that there is but one Mediator between God and man, even Jesus Christ."

At that moment a rustling was heard at the door. It was only one of the servants who passed by, but a shock passed through Maria's frame.

"Holy Virgin," she whispered, "can anybody have heard us?"

"Do not be alarmed," said Agnes, with a sad smile. "They won't be so very quick upon us."

"Ah, but it is horrible," ejaculated the poor girl; "just think of the Inquisition, and the rack, and the screws, and all those horrible things."

"Maria, Maria," said Agnes, reprovingly, taking her cousin's hand in hers; "how weak is your faith! Is Jesus not mighty to protect you? and did He shrink back from the cross, by which He has saved us?"

Maria's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, do pray for me," she said. "I wish I had a faith like yours. I am just thinking of the two counts," she said, after a pause, "who are lingering at present above our heads, hourly expecting their death. Is it not sad to think of these noble sufferers?"

"And especially hard for the Count Egmont," said Agnes; "for Count Horn is a Protestant, and he may look upon his death as a sort of martyrdom. But Count Egmont is a devout Catholic. He has ever obeyed and venerated the priests; he has even persecuted us, the adherents to the reformed religion; and in spite of all he has done he is to be executed."

There was a moment's silence. The laughter of the soldiers, and the measured tread of the sentry who was posted at the back door, were heard in the room.

"I hate these soldiers," said Maria; "they are such profane and godless men, they care for nothing. I think they deserve as much, if not more, than the counts."

"I wish I knew of some way of getting them free," mused Agnes; "I would try it. I know Count Egmont will have learned by this time that he must not put his trust in princes. But, Maria, my dear, you must go to bed again; you are not strong yet, you know, and we must soon make you ready to go to Brill."

"I am not very eager to return to Brill," said Maria; "for, you know, I shall be dull there, and have no companion, now that Karel is away."

"You will have the baroness," said Agnes, archly. "You had no other company before; for surely Karel was not much of a companion, was he?"

"Oh, Agnes, how can you say that?" said Maria, in a gentle, chiding tone; "have I not seen you yearning in silence for the last five months, since Karel has absented himself from here? And whenever there is a story about Beggars, you ask with such interest after his name, even more than I do. I would have thought you the very last person to say this."

Agnes kissed her cousin tenderly, and said nothing, for the simple reason that there was nothing whatever to say. After a little remonstrance she prevailed upon Maria to lie down on the bed, and having waited till her cousin fell into a slumber, she softly crept out of the room, and crossing the passage, entered the little private kitchen, where Gritta, the servant, was busily scrubbing some brass utensils and humming a tune.

After having exchanged a kind word with her, she passed through the door at the other end of it into the sitting-room of the family, and presently her busy little feet were turning the wheel of her spinning machine.

CHAPTER V.

A SELF-CONTENTED MAN.

ADRIAN VLOSSERT, the warder of the Broodhuys, was a man of no uncommon type. With a fair amount of personal bravery when in danger, he possessed an equal amount of cupidity and superstition; while his conduct in all cases was marked by a total absence of principle. To please those who were in power, and especially in power over him, and to fawn on the great, was his chief occupation; to be in disgrace even for a noble cause, was with him utter ruin; and pitifully did he look upon those who rather chose to give up all they had than denounce what they had once adopted as truth.

He did not, however, consider himself in this light; but regarded the respect, or rather indulgence, with which he was treated, as a just reward for his merits. It is true, some thirty years ago his merits were different from what they were now; but he neither loved to speak nor to think about that time.

Then, vehement protestations were made in his native city, Ghent, against the arbitrary acts of Charles V.; and believing that little danger was attached to it, he allowed himself to be prevailed upon by some stout burghers to clamor as loudly as the rest. He had even gone so far as to attend meetings of the heretics outside the town, and protested to all his friends that liberty of religion was the thing to be desired.

But when he saw the glittering armor of the Emperor's suite in the spacious streets of the old town, when he saw some of his friends swinging on the gallows, and others kneeling in forced submission at the Emperor's feet, clad in a single shirt, and with a halter round their necks, while his own purse testified to some part of the punishment inflicted upon the rebellious city, he confessed that Charles's logic was the most powerful, and his line of conduct was chang-

ed accordingly. He entered the army, and after some years rose to the dignity of captain, showing himself all the while a zealous supporter of the reigning family. No matter how ruinous or how arbitrary their edicts and their placards, he applauded and defended; but when they became too unpopular, and had to be repealed, he forsook them, and praised their successors. When, some twenty years ago, he obtained his present post, his loyalty knew no bounds, and he even dared to assert that Philip, the new king, was as handsome a man and as able a potentate as his father. The Duke of Savoy, Cardinal Granvelle, Orange, Egmont, and other nobles were each in his turn taken up and dropped successively, the late favorites being each time buried under a load of abuse.

He had become a zealous Roman Catholic, too, and the Inquisition and the Jesuits found in him a pious and ardent supporter, as he was a devoted invoker of all the saints in the catalogue. Being at the same time convivial and good-humored, he was rather liked as a companion, especially among soldiers, in whose company he dismissed some of the pious and loyal glitter with which he shone. Had the Netherlands known no other citizens, they would long since have been crushed under the yoke of slavery. A little more talent might have made him another Noircarmes or a Virgilius. As he was now, he was comparatively harmless; but in the absence of those higher qualities, what remained there for those who knew him but to despise?

Perhaps the only one with whom this was not the case was Agnes. She still honored and loved him as her father; but could she also obey him in everything, and acquaint him with all that took place in her heart? Not only was it impossible for her to make

him her confidant—and who should be this more than a father, especially to an only and orphaned daughter?—but to her inexpressible grief she could not but look upon him as an enemy in relation to everything which she loved and revered. She loved Jesus; he used that holy name, if he used it at all, as an oath. Alas! it is a sad thing for a believing and loving child to have such a father; and yet what else but the possibility of such painful trials has the Lord prophesied, when He said, “Think not that I have come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword; and to set a man at variance against his father?”

The warder was just leaving the room, where he had been playing cards with the officers of the watch appointed to guard the illustrious prisoners, and whose money, won at the game, had put him in high good-humor. He was expensively and somewhat gaudily dressed. A light silk doublet, laced and embroidered, a wide hose of violet velvet, reaching to the knee, colored stockings, a broad linen collar, a felt hat, the plume of which was fastened with a magnificent diamond hook, a like ornament for his broad belt, and silver buckles for his shoes, and you have him, *in toto*. Traversing the hall, he descended the broad stairs which led to the ground floor; and jingling his money, he stroked his beard with a contented smile, and entered the apartment which he and Agnes used as a family room.

It was not a large room, but for those days handsomely furnished, though at the present day the furniture would certainly be called clumsy. At the high window, with its small panes set in lead, and its heavy and somewhat sombre velvet curtains, sat Agnes, on a high-backed chair; and though ever and anon she touched the spinning-wheel before her with her little foot, it was easily seen that her thoughts were far away from her work. It was too dark to work, as the long shadows of the house which formed the other side of the lane soon deprived them of the light of the sun.

“Well, my daughter, thou lookest pale; dost ail anything?” said her father, as he

went up to her, and playfully pinched her marble cheek.

“And have I no reason to look pale, father dear?” said she, rising and kissing him affectionately.

“Ay, what, Agnes?” he said, slyly; “has that rascally Captain Pedro spoken to thee about anything? Well, I am glad to see thee taking it to heart. He is a likely man, I trow, though somewhat soldier-like.”

“No, father. My reason is the same as that which makes almost every woman in Brabant and in the Netherlands look pale.”

“What can that be?” said her father, as he threw himself in an arm-chair; “they surely havn’t all got Captain Pedros to speak to them, have they?”

“They have either him or some other of these foreign and mercenary oppressors about them,” said Agnes, with a touch of disdain in her sweet, low voice. “You know as well as I do, father, that they are chiefly sent here to burden the poor people, and rob the most virtuous.”

“Jesus! Maria! Child! stop thy dangerous tongue, or, by St. Ann, we shall both be marched off to prison to-night. Remember that you are easily heard through these thin windows, and such language has brought many a better one than thee to the scaffold.”

“As it will again in a few days,” said Agnes, little heeding his injunctions. “I am only saying what is true, father, and what can be proved by thousands of witnesses. Do you not feel for the two counts that are sitting upstairs? and are you still willing to serve a man who rewards his best servant in this manner?”

“By our thrice-blessed Lady,” said Vlosert, impatiently; “don’t speak so loud, whatever you do, and hold your tongue, if you can’t say anything else. Don’t you know that you are in open rebellion against the king and his excellency the duke? As a true and faithful soldier, I ought to inform against you now; but I warn you in time, that you may repent of your rebellious spirit, and thank me for my leniency.”

“Rebellious spirit!” repeated Agnes. “Is it a rebellious spirit to pity the man that is

being murdered in the street? But I know you say this because you are afraid of being overheard, because a free burgher of the city of Brussels cannot live in his own house without being afraid that some treacherous Jesuit may be listening at the keyhole or the window. But you need not fear, father," she continued, stroking his hair; "you are too zealous a partisan of theirs to be suspected. And, moreover, the bloodhounds' attention is now directed to nobler martyrs than Adrian Vlossert."

"Martyrs! what martyrs are you talking of, child?" said he. "Keep to your spinning-wheel, and take care of that guest of ours, that sister of the greatest Beggar and vagabond under the sun, whom I should like to see hanged to-day. That fellow and his connection with us will bring us to trouble yet."

"Karel is no vagabond, father," said Agnes, indignantly, and with flushed cheeks. "He is a noble defender of our liberties, and neither he nor his uncles have deserved hanging, any more than the prince himself."

"Ay, I should like *him* to keep Count Egmont company. He brings nothing but disturbances about; and whenever there is news of him the people go half-mad."

"I remember the time when you thought differently about both of them, father," said Agnes, pouring out some wine, and handing it to him. "I remember the time when the news of the battle of St. Quentin came, and you said that you considered Count Egmont the greatest general of his age, and that if he and the prince could be governors of the provinces, it would be a splendid thing for us."

"Yes, Agnes," said Vlossert hastily, "there has been such a time, I acknowledge; but even the king was pleased with them then. But affairs have very much altered since; were they not both the first men to act against the cardinal? Did they not draw up a letter to the king, in which they said that the cardinal was a despot, and that consequently he ought to go. Did not Count Egmont threaten to bring an army into the provinces? and did he not congregate with traitors,

and talk on treasonable matters? Why. I remember one day, when he was banqueting here in the upper room with the masters of the Fleecers' Guild, that he drank a toast to the speedy removal of all fools and fools'-caps from this country, and the speedy restoration of all our old liberties. Whom did he mean but the cardinal? Besides, what business have we to ask whether the count is guilty or not, when the duke and his counsels have condemned him after due examination?"

"But have they a right to condemn him? That's what I want to know," said Agnes, who was not thus to be convinced. "Of course, they won't execute him, and say that he is innocent; but the charges against him cannot be proved, at least not sufficiently to justify his death. And I very well remember the evening of which you speak, father; when the count proposed that toast, you told us afterwards that you cheered—"

"Hush! Agnes, hush! Our Lady preserve us! Be silent, child. Give me pen and ink and paper. I came down to write a note. Now say no mote."

"You cheered and applauded as loudly as the rest," continued Agnes with obstinacy: "and you said you liked his speech very much."

"No; nonsense!" said Vlossert, anxiously. "Did I? You must have been mistaken; I never applauded against the cardinal. It would have been very foolish, for he is a mighty man. St. Ann preserve us! I hope it did not come out on the count's trial, or I am a lost man."

"Trial!" said Agnes scornfully, "what trial has he had? What trial can a man have, when he is all the time shut up in prison, and is not allowed to defend himself in person, or get legal advice? He has not been outside a prison for nine months since he was kidnapped by the duke. And if he is really guilty, why is he not judged by the other knights of the Golden Fleece? for you know very well that such a knight can only be judged by his peers. But against all rule and right they have both been tried and condemned, and will be executed in an unlawful and disgraceful manner. Woe, woe to this

unhappy country, when men even of such importance can be brought to the scaffold for no greater crime than that they loved their own countrymen better than a false and deceitful cardinal, whose very name must sound detestable in every one's ear!"

"Vlossert listened to his daughter with admiration; for her enthusiasm and indignation had heightened her color, and made her look doubly beautiful. He secretly acknowledged that her words were true, but he thought it prudent to protest against her denunciation of Granvelle.

"Hush! my daughter," he said; "you must remember that the cardinal is a pious and holy man, and that your confessor will not give you absolution for so great a sin as to speak against him."

"I thank God I can do without it," said Agnes, from the bottom of her heart.

Vlossert started. He knew that his daughter was very liberal and patriotic in her views, though she was careful enough to hide them. He had often been afraid, too, that she would turn a heretic, for she went to mass but seldom, and treated Father Florisz, her confessor, with little better than contempt. These words seemed to confirm his worst suspicion. He started up, and seizing her by the arm said, in a trembling voice:

"What do you mean by these words, girl? Speak! Do you require no absolution? Holy Virgin! has your head been turned by these damnable heretics?"

Agnes covered her face with her hands, and dropped into a chair. Knowing her father's character, she had not deemed it advisable to tell him of her conversion as yet. Now, however, in the heat of her argument, she had parted with her secret, and as she sat there, she prayed to God from her inmost heart that He might strengthen her. Her father, however, mistook her attitude for fear; and, glad that he found her so soon repentant of her own rashness, he thought the occasion good for a little sermon.

"The Holy Virgin," he said, gravely crossing himself, "is looking down upon you just now with sorrow and compassion—and so am I, for that matter—because of your great

wickedness in thus speaking of her holy servants. I shall go forthwith, and send Father Florisz here, who will speak to you about this great sin of yours, and show you how to obtain absolution of it."

He turned round to leave the apartment, but his daughter seized his mantle.

"Do not send Father Florisz to me," she said, speaking as with difficulty, yet calmly; "for he would do me no good whatever. I have not said a single word against the Mother of our Redeemer. But I have spoken against the folly of having your sins forgiven by any but Jesus Christ."

"Agnes, I cannot hear you say such things," said her father; "for the sake of everything that is dear to you, for the sake of your eternal salvation, I beseech, I implore you, say that you do not mean these words, and that you spoke them thoughtlessly."

But Agnes was firm now. She was prepared for her father's opposition.

"My dear father," she said sadly, "it is just for the sake of my eternal salvation that I do say these things; and would that you said them too! It will be such a blessing to you, I am certain, when you begin to see that there is no salvation in priests, and gaudy dresses, and crosses, and incense, and all that rubbish."

"Jesus! what shall I do!" said the alarmed soldier, wringing his hands in despair at the fate of his child. "Agnes! think to what fearful dangers you are exposing yourself! If my lord the inquisitor heard one word of what you said just now—O God! I shudder to think what would become of you."

"My lord the inquisitor can do no more with me than God shall allow," said Agnes, boldly; and if I should have to choose, I'd rather have temporary pain here than everlasting pain hereafter. But why are you so alarmed, my dear father? I love you as much as formerly—nay, more—since I feel a greater love for all men."

"Ah, Agnes, my child," said Vlossert, standing before her, and speaking with a voice trembling with emotion; "I have been a good father to you. You have never been in want of anything that I could procure you. I have

allowed you to learn everything that suits your position in life, and I expect that you shall obey me as becomes a dutiful child. I command you to repeal these words, and never breathe them again. You must; you shall!"

Agnes shook her head. Tears were flowing from her eyes, and in a voice almost inaudible, she said:

"I cannot, father. I have never disobeyed you yet. But in this I must follow God's command more than yours. But do not be angry with me."

"Ha, that is surely a very perfect religion that teaches children to disobey their parents, and bring disgrace and ruin upon the house! You, who profess to serve God, you will tell me that you can disobey me, and excuse yourself as you do so! You, who denounce the priests and holy fathers, you will set up a moral of your own! This, then, is your re-

ligion that you have been preaching for some time. I shall leave you to yourself to-night, but to-morrow morning I shall bring Father Florisz to you; and cursed be you till your dying day, if you do not confess all to him, and do penance for your heresies!"

And swinging round, he left the poor girl sobbing and bending down in her chair. The anger of her father had touched her more than she had expected; and though she knew that she was in the right, she could not refrain from giving vent to her grief in a flood of tears.

Suddenly a strong arm was thrown round her waist, her hands were seized tenderly, and a low voice said compassionately:

"Do I find my Agnes in such grief? What causes these tears?"

She looked up—a smile brightened her face, and jumping up, she fell on the breast of Karel Galama.

CHAPTER VI.

A DARK INTERVIEW.

To explain the somewhat sudden and mysterious appearance of our old acquaintance, Vonker Karel, let us for a few moments step through the door, which he has left open, into the kitchen. It has already been noticed that a corridor or passage ran through the ground floor, from the market to the little lane, dividing into two equal parts, which were again divided by a cross-passage, thus forming four square blocks of rooms to the north, east, south, and west. Those to the north and east had their windows looking out upon the little lane, and consisted respectively of the private kitchen and the family-room on the north side, and three bedrooms on the east, while the two blocks on the south and west, looking out upon the square, were set apart for the domestics belonging to the Broodhuys.

It will thus be seen that the room where the above scene took place could be entered by two doors, one opening into the cross-passage, almost at the foot of the stairs which led to the hall, and the other into the kitchen. At the time at which the interview just described took place, this kitchen was occupied by Gritta, the neat, buxom, and active little servant, who was engaged in spinning flax for her mistress.

"I think it a great bother," said she to herself, "to have the house filled with them foreign soldiers and their noises. I wish these dukes and counts wouldn't keep a-quarrelling amongst themselves, and disturbing the rest of a poor body as does them no harm."

"Ah, Gritta, you be a vine liddle woman," said a German soldier, who had been pacing up and down, on guard, before the back door, resting his halberd on the stones of the passage, and looking at Gritta through the kitchen door.

"Get out," said she, with a toss of her head. "I don't like speaking to any of the butchering boys as crawls about here. My mother was a respectable woman, and she always said that I was born at the striking of twelve, which, to be sure, means that I am respectable too."

"Eh! that is a curious thing, now," said the soldier, "and I was done that way myself exactly, at the striking of the twelve; so I must be respectable too."

"Were you, though?" said the girl, looking up with interest, "and did you put your foot in your mouth immediately? because she told me if I had done that I would have become very rich."

"Well, I can't speak to that myself," said the man of the sword; "but my mother did tell me I put my left foot down my throat, and they couldn't get it out for some time. But I don't remember that myself; at least I couldn't do it now."

"Dear me, dear me!" said the girl, astonished; "you are the first one whom I have met that has done it, and I have asked ever so many. And have you become rich, then?"

"Haven't I, Gritta? Just look at this!" said the soldier, pulling some pieces of gold from his pocket, and chinking them in his hand, to the apparent delight of the simple-minded girl. "And the best of these pieces is, that they never grow less, and the more you use them the bigger they get. What think you of that?"

"That's like our good lady of St. Gudule," said Gritta, coming nearer the door; "for Father Florisz told me himself that they had a new lady put up, and he poured some costly oil on her head one evening at vespers, and the next morning her hair had grown right down to her feet, and now he says it

grows twice a week ; and I've got some of it," she added, with an air of importance.*

"And won't you let me have a look at it, Gritta?" said the soldier, coming nearer the kitchen door. At first Gritta was inexorable. At last, however, she gave way to the entreaties of her admirer, and proceeded to look for the little box where the precious relic was stowed away. But as it had grown too dark for her, she proceeded to light a little brass lamp with a taper which she lit at the smouldering fire on the hearth. Suddenly, however, while she was standing, lamp in hand, before the table which stood under the window, she heard a very soft knock at the glass. She looked up, gave a scream, and dropped the lamp.

The halberdier jumped into the kitchen, weapon in hand, expecting to pin some foe with it to the ground, but was requested by Gritta not to make a fool of himself. She had only burned her fingers with the taper, and he thought it was Black Herman who had played her a trick. So presently lighting another taper she lit the lamp, and soon after found the little lock of hair of St. Gúdule.

It seemed, however, as if the relic in question did not please the enamored warrior so greatly as another specimen of hair which was within his reach ; at any rate, he protested that he considered Gritta's own hair by far the better of the two, and craved permission just to cut off a little lock.

"Go away," said the girl, giving him a sound box on the ear, as he endeavored to seize her hair. I have vowed to our good lady that I shall allow no one to cut a bit of my hair except on one condition."

"Tell me the condition," he said, "and I swear by all the saints in heaven that I will do it, were it ever so bad."

"Oh, it is not the least use telling you," said she, shaking her head ; "for you daren't do it, I know. You would get arrested if you were found out, and I couldn't bear that, I'm sure." And she turned her head away.

The poor fellow being thus put upon his point of honor, swore and protested, high and low, that he would die for her.

"Well, then," said Gritta, "you must take this taper, and light it, and take this can, and go to, the wine-cellar below here, and go to the big vat you'll see in the farthest-off corner, and beat on it three times with your fist, and cry 'Come! come! come!' and you must count slowly from one to a hundred ; and when nothing comes, you must draw a can of wine, and come back to me. There, now."

The bold warrior stood for a moment in hesitation.

"What if the officer comes?" he said ; "I'll catch it, by St. Ada!"

"There, now, I know you daren't. Get out, and don't molest a poor girl, or I'll scream. Here! help!"

"Hush! give me the can and the taper," said the fellow, putting his halberd to the post of the door with a desperate effort. Gritta gave him the two articles, and preceded him to the door of the wine-cellar.

"The large barrel in the farthest-off corner," she whispered, as he went down stairs, cautiously holding the burning taper before him. He soon reached the bottom of the stairs, and turned into the cellar. No sooner, however, had he disappeared, than Gritta locked the door of the cellar, put the key in her pocket, and ran to the back door. She looked outside, but not a soul was visible in the little lane, not a figure was distinguishable in the dusk. And yet, when Gritta had peered for a moment and sounded a "Pst!" a figure which stood in an opposite doorway, and was wrapped up in a large dark cloak, crossed the lane, and made one leap into the kitchen, where the servant followed him, and closed the door. The mantle fell off, and revealed Galama.

For a few moments it seemed as if terror and astonishment at his sudden movement into the kitchen had deprived the superstitious servant-girl of her power of speech. She stared at him with her hands clasped and her heart beating violently. She had seen his face through the window, and immediately resolved to get the soldier away ; but she had not expected him to come into the house.

"Oh, Yonker Karel," she said, rapidly,

* See Appendix.

"flee, flee quickly. Don't you know that the house is full of soldiers, and they'll murder you when they find you here? Flee! Oh, Holy Mother of God, help us! Don't stop here another minute."

The young Frisian looked at her for a moment with an air of abstraction:

"Is Agnes here?" he asked in a whisper.

"Where is she! and where is my sister? She must be here, too. Don't disturb yourself, Gritta; there's no fear."

"Yes, there *is*," she said, seizing his hand, and pointing to the door. "Did you not see me speak to a soldier when you looked through the window? I managed to get him away, but he will be back presently; and then, when he finds you here, it will be all up with you. I thought something awful would happen to-day, for the cat scalded itself with the hot water, and that's a sure sign. I think I hear him coming up the stairs, Yonker. Oh! you're a lost man."

But in the same degree as Gritta's terror augmented, Galama's presence of mind seemed to become greater. He passed his hand over his forehead, and seemed to think for a moment. Then he said quickly and softly:

"Silence, Gritta! and answer me. Go and lock that door. Where is Agnes? I *must* see her. There is no fear of any harm falling me. Don't you see I am a Spanish officer now, and that fellow would be too frightened to look closely at me. But quick, now! is Agnes in here?"

And he made a movement to the door which communicated with the sitting-room. But Gritta sprang up and seized his mantle.

"Not there, not there, for God's sake!" she cried in a hoarse whisper. "The warder is in there with his daughter, and they have been quarrelling for the last half hour. He never speaks about you but he flies into a rage; and if you were to go in now, you would never get away again. But here, go into this cupboard, and I'll tell my mistress that you are here; or come, I'll bring you to your sister's room. Quick, Yonker; there is no time to be lost. What are you—?"

The Beggar turned round and pressed his finger to his lips. Instead of going into the

cupboard, he had softly opened the door of the room about an inch or two, and with his ear to the opening thus made, he could hear every word of conversation between Vlossert and his daughter. It was at that moment that the warder, as reported in the preceding chapter, had commanded his daughter to foreswear her new religion, and had met with her sad but firm refusal.

Just at that moment soft raps were heard at the cellar door in the passage. The terrified servant sank on her knees, and seized her rosary.

"O our lady of St. Gudule! God Almighty! here is the soldier wanting to get out. Oh, Yonker, I have known you from a boy, and you will be killed before my eyes. Oh!"

The thumps became somewhat louder, and a voice was heard indistinctly.

"Go and let the poor fellow out of his prison," whispered Galama; "but don't let him come into this room; do you hear?" and he slipped softly into the room, and went up to the figure of the weeping girl.

For the first few moments the two lovers gave themselves entirely up to the enchantment of the unexpected meeting; but then, simultaneously, a recollection of the danger of their position made them start, and Agnes, looking at Galama with an expression of unutterable tenderness, said in an anxious tone:

"Karel! do you know what you are doing? Do you know that my father may be back here any moment, and that if he finds you here he will have you locked up?"

"Do you wish to hunt me away so soon as this, Agnes?" he said, encircling her with his arms. "We have not seen each other for nearly a year, since the duke arrived in the provinces. Surely you won't send me away yet. I heard your father say that he would leave you alone for to-night. Can you not shut that door, so that we may have some warning of his coming?—then we can open the window, and I can escape that way, if it should come to the worst. You see, we Beggars are getting accustomed to this kind of interviews, and I think I have entered a house as often by the window as by the door. Can't you do that, my own Agnes? For I

have a great deal to say to you, and I *must* say it now."

The thought of the imminent risk of her lover being discovered, had caused Agnes for a moment to lose her accustomed presence of mind; and trembling nervously, she rested passively within the outlaw's strong embrace. But when she heard his advice as to the precautions that might be taken, she aroused herself out of her stupor, and pressing her hands before her face, which was still wet with tears, she controlled herself with one strong effort. Then, walking with a firm step to the door, she locked it, putting in the bolt with which every door in those days was provided, and stepped to the window; but in the act of endeavoring to open it, she paused, and said:

"I don't know whether it is advisable, Karel; for if we open the window, some of the spies that are always crawling about might hear your voice. I think we should just unfasten it, and draw the curtain before it, so that—"

She paused, and stepped back with a quick gesture, pressing her hand to her beating heart. Galama had just filled a bumper from a can of wine which was standing on the table, and was emptying its contents when he saw Agnes's movement. He put down the cup, and ran to the place where she stood.

"What is it?" he asked, in alarm. "Are you ill?"

"Nothing," she said, smiling faintly. "Only, while I was trying to unfasten the window, I thought I saw the face of a man staring in. But I must be mistaken: for it is so dark that I should not be able to distinguish it, if it were a man."

"Well, it would be nothing if there were a spy," said Galama; "he can't see me. But for prudence' sake, draw the curtain, and shut this door too;" and he pointed to the kitchen door, through which he had himself come. "And now, my darling," he said, as he led her to the seat where he had found her, and seated himself on a stool at her feet; "let us talk for a few moments about the important matters for which I have partly come here."

He paused, and unfastening the band of

his heavy and pressing helmet, he put it beside him on the ground. Then, leaning his head against the chair, he looked up into Agnes's face, though it was hardly visible in the faint twilight which still lingered in the room. But he could see that a great change had come over that face in the short space of time that he had been in her presence. At the moment when he first found her, the poor motherless girl had well-nigh received a curse from the only relation she had about her, and the only person, except her aunt Galama in Brill, whom she had not seen for years, to whom she could look up with reverence. She felt how lonely she had become, now the only one who should have been her support, threatened to become her enemy.

But there Galama enters, as if sent by God, to occupy that place at her side which her father had so cruelly left. No, she was not alone in this world! His appearance brought the roses back to her cheeks, and his words reminded her forcibly of the great and sacred questions in which she was engaged. It brought most clearly to her mind that it was no choice with her as to liking or not liking, but a question of deep, of holy principle. She forced back her tears; and though she knew not what were the reasons of Karel's visit, she was determined to hear him and help him if she could.

"I do not know, Agnes," he said, after a moment's silence, in a low voice, "whether your opinions have undergone a change since I saw you last. I do not mean whether you love me less than formerly, for I know you don't, but whether, like your father, you look upon me as an outlaw, a rebel, an enemy of the country. I remember your former indignation at the oppressions of Granvelle, and at the arbitrary and disgraceful manner in which he has infringed every one of our ancient and sacred liberties and privileges. I remember, too, that you spoke with enthusiasm about the heroic conduct of the Prince of Orange, God bless him! But I fear lest the continual influence of the slaves amongst whom you live, the company and the talk of those degraded men who reckon their country, their great and glorious country, and their

sacred rights of less importance than their own miserable bodies, that will be rotten in the course of a few years—I fear lest their examples and arguments have weakened the grounds of noble patriotism upon which your enthusiasm was built. Tell me whether my fears are just. If they are, farewell! The holy Virgin be with you; for I shall love, but leave you forever.”

He paused, and seemed to wait anxiously for her answer.

“It is quite true, Karel,” she said, somewhat hurriedly, “that when we last met, I spoke to you with indignation about the oppressions which the poor people at present have to suffer; but I think you were and are mistaken as to the grounds which made me feel so indignant. I know the only, at least the chief, reason, why *you* have seized arms against Alva, is the violent and unbearable manner in which all the liberties of this country have been trampled upon, and the life of every inhabitant imperilled. I fully approve of this reason. But above this I have another, a more sacred one, and I would to God you had it too. You know that three years ago I used to attend the lessons of Master Wouter Barends, the godly disciple of Calvin, and through him I saw the folly and sinfulness of worshipping any one but God. The chief reason for my indignation is the manner in which the priests try to withhold from the people the Gospel of salvation. It is not them I hate, but their wicked system. I pray that mine be a holy anger, and not vengeance. I trust that God will make me day by day stronger to walk in the Spirit of Christ. For I confess that it is sometimes very hard to pray for our enemies, when we see them hang our relations before our very doors. But Oh, Karel, if we remember what Jesus did for us, and how He prayed for His oppressors, even at the very moment when they crucified Him, we *must* try.”

Tears of emotion smothered her voice. Galama was silent. Certainly, this was a different reason to his, though it did not exclude it. He seized her hand and pressed it to his lips. “You are better than I am,” he said. “God knows that the recollection of

those things which you have said to me before, has been with me always, and has kept me from doing many a thing which I should otherwise have done. And yet your words have somewhat disappointed me. I thought that your religious ideas would not have prevented you from helping me, helping us, helping the nation, in a matter so grave. Oh, Egmont! Egmont! shall you then have to die like the meanest culprit, when you might help us in destroying the monster that threatens all of us with perdition? O God! is there no help? Is there nothing, nothing that I can think of?”

In his agitation he arose, and stood before Agnes, with his hands lifted up to heaven, and his voice broken with agony.

“Egmont! What do you mean?” whispered Agnes, half-rising, and pressing Galama down again to his former position. “Sit down and tell me.”

“I forgot,” said he, smiling faintly, “that other people think not as I do, and that, while there is the least chance of rescuing that man, they can think of aught but that. Is there a chance, a shadow of one?”

“Of rescuing the two counts?” asked Agnes, as if she could not as yet realize the idea. “There is not.”

“For neither? Think! There *must* be. Where are they?”

“They were only brought in here this morning. Count Horn is in one of the front rooms on the second-floor. For him I am certain there is not a shadow. Count Egmont is in the room of the Bowman’s guild; and with him, too, it is impossible.”

But the tone in which she uttered the last words was hesitating.

“It *is* possible!” said Galama, catching at that; “all the Beggars are ready to try.”

“All the Beggars would be of no use,” answered Agnes. “But hear me, and you will be convinced that it is impossible. There is a soldier in his room, armed to the teeth. Then there are two before his door, two at the top of the stair, and the next staircase is also well guarded. The only way by which you can enter the room is by the one door that is guarded, or by the chimney, to get at

which you would have to go to the garret and pass all the soldiers, which you could not do without an order from the captain of the guard or my father."

"But does not Father Florisz go up and down the stairs without being stopped by the soldiers?" asked Galama, after a moment's silence.

"He does," answered Agnes; "but he won't be here to-night nor to-morrow."

"Yes, he will, Agnes! Did not your father say that he would send him to you to-morrow morning?"

"True," said Agnes, sadly, as the recollection of the scene came back to her. "And may God strengthen me to sustain his visit. But he would not help us for all the world."

"But he must, without knowing it," whispered Karel, speaking rapidly. "My plan is made. Remember the grave nature of my plan, and do not shrink back from its danger. To-morrow morning you must pretend to be unwell, and when Florisz comes, you must tell him you had rather see him in the evening. When he comes in the evening, put him in Maria's room, who, as I hear from Gritta, is not quite recovered. In the meantime I shall come in a similar dress—he is a Dominican, is he not? You take me up to the garret, and if God and my dagger do not help me further, I am willing to die, even if my attempt should fail. There is a chance of escaping on to the next house, the fish-market, at any rate."

For a moment Agnes sat speechless and horror-struck, as the full audacity of this plan revealed itself to her. She was unable at first to understand the mind that could conceive such a plan; but when she saw the reality before her, she started back from the idea of lending her hand to accomplish what seemed to her nothing short of her lover's capture and death. She tried all her powers of persuasion to alter his mind; every danger, and there were many, every obstacle, every likelihood of discovery, every chance of being overcome at the last moment, she put before him in the most vivid colors which her love for him summoned to her aid. She implored, she wept, she threatened to reveal all; but it was in vain. She

might have known before hand that the most powerful of persuasions are shipwrecked upon the obstinacy of the Frisian character, especially when it is heightened by patriotic enthusiasm.

It was a touching sight to see her, when at last exhausted, her whole body shaking with sobs, she lay almost breathless in her chair, and her tearful eyes searched for the all but invisible erect and warlike form of the young Beggar.

"For the last time, Karel, and answer me not rashly. Choose another of your companions, and I will risk everything; but do not come yourself; for your life is more precious to me even than my own, and I would not for anything put you in such danger. Let any other Beggar come, and I am ready to help him."

"Is this, then, your patriotism, Agnes?" said he, in a somewhat stern voice; "do you prefer me to your country, to the whole nation? Fie! Promise me this: for I must go, that whoever shall come, you will help. I shall let my companions choose; and if they choose me, promise me that you will treat me as the rest. In a cause so sacred as ours, no man is different from another. Will you promise?"

"I will," said Agnes, in a low voice; and she gave a sob.

"God! I know Thee but little, but Thou wilt hear my prayer. Keep this beloved child of Thine under Thy care, and guard her against our enemies!" Kneeling before her, and with her head resting upon his cold breastplate, he breathed this prayer to the God whom he saw as yet but dimly by the light of her piety. One long and passionate embrace, and he rose.

Cautiously opening the window, and looking out, he saw no one. One light jump placed him outside in the street. He quickly shut the window behind him, wrapped his mantle around his body, and crept away through the darkness, which, as a symbol of the shadow of death that hung over the inhabitants of the provinces, enveloped the city in its impenetrable folds, and cast its gloom alike upon the magnificent palace of the noble, and the humble dwelling of the artisan.

CHAPTER VII.

"AD PATIBULUM."

TURNING to the left, as he alighted from the window, Yonker Galama stepped onward with long strides, keeping as near the houses as he possibly could. It was now completely dark; threatening clouds swept with incessant rapidity before the moon. It seemed almost as if with the daylight all traces of life had disappeared from the city. The brawling of the wealthy nobles who were wont to congregate in its hall, or the gay voices of burghers as they went to or from a place of entertainment, were no longer heard in the street. The shop-windows, formerly presenting a lively appearance, were closed, and but for a faint glimmering of light through an occasional shutter, one might have thought that the inhabitants of one of the first cities in the world spent their nights indoors in complete darkness.

When Galama had passed the building which flanked the Broodhuys, and which was used as a meat-market, he turned a little to the left, and found himself presently in La Chaussée, the principal street which ran from the Coudenberg Gate and the palace to the market-place. It would nowadays have caused great astonishment, if such a notorious rebel as Galama were to walk through the streets of the metropolis even at night; but my readers must remember that the streets in those days were not lighted at all, and that every one who desired to see how or where he was walking, found it necessary to carry his own light, or in case he was a rich man to have it carried for him.

There was thus not much danger in Galama's walking alone in the darkness; but he kept his ears wide open, for it was possible at every turning of the street that he might meet with some foe who was thus provided with light and attendants, in which case he foresaw his danger would be very great.

Happily, however, he encountered no one. After having walked for some five or six minutes at a smart pace, he paused before the palace of the Nassau family, the spot where he was to meet Block, but where the latter did not seem to have yet arrived. Suddenly, voices were heard approaching him, and gleams of light fell upon the palace. It was clear that a party, and probably a numerous and armed one, was coming through the street which led almost from opposite the Nassau Palace to that where the Duke of Alva was then residing. Galama looked round for a place where he could escape the observation of the approaching party. A porch, which was somewhat deeper than the others, and had more-over a corner in it, seemed to offer a very good shelter. In a moment he jumped into the corner, and covering himself with his mantle, pressed closely against the wall.

It was not a moment too soon. A number of men turned round the corner, and followed the road by which he had just come. The party consisted of a dozen torch-bearers, some five or six of whom were Spanish soldiers, while the gentlemen whom they surrounded seemed by their dress and the loudness of their tones to be men of rank and authority.

"Well, your worship," said one of the gentlemen, addressing a stoutish man, who, with one other companion, was not dressed in the military fashion. "I think that I can boast of having fairly gained my bet, and that the *gladius* has conquered the *patibulum*—in this case, at any rate."

The answer of the person thus addressed was lost in the distance; but the Yonker had heard and seen enough to make him gnash his teeth. He had recognized at least the two principal men in the whole group. The one was Julian de Vargas, the famous presi-

dent of the "Blood Council," whose incredible cruelty and ferocity are even now, after nearly three centuries, a proverb in the Netherlands; the other one was the scarcely less famous Hessels, also a member of the same council, whose conduct, however, was mixed with just a little touch of the ludicrous. It will not be out of place here, perhaps, to say a few words in explanation.

Being convinced that through the regular and lawful courts but few convictions, and still fewer confiscations, would be obtained, the Duke of Alva instituted, on his arrival in the provinces, a council, or tribunal, of his own, which he called the "Council of Troubles," and which was to supersede all other institutions. It was composed of twelve members, of whom only two could vote as to the ultimate fate of the accused, while the rest were present to give the proceedings the appearance of lawfulness, however little they might possess it in reality. For it must be known that the council was purely an invention of the duke himself, unauthorized by any act, charter, or decree whatever, and merely maintained through the force of the soldiers whom he had brought with him. So great was the ferocity of this council, mainly owing to the activity of its president, De Vargas, that within three months of its institution nearly two thousand persons of all ranks had suffered death by its decrees. We have mentioned that only two members could really vote: the one was De Vargas, the other Del Rio, also a Spaniard; but amongst the members who composed this board, and whose nominal voice was sometimes given, was the above-named Hessels. This man used to pass his time at the council-board, comfortably seated and dozing, while the cases under consideration were being heard, and when a soft shake from one of his neighbors warned him that his opinion was wanted, he lisped a sweet "*Ad patibulum*" (To the gallows), and forthwith returned to his former occupation—that of snoring. It was to this the more bloodthirsty De Vargas alluded; for by the above word he meant that the fate of the two counts had not been conformable with Hessels' sentence, but with his.

It was the appearance of these two men which made the Yonker's blood boil in his veins. He grasped the hilt of his sword with a fierce and violent gesture, and felt as if the greatest pleasure imaginable to him would have been nothing compared to the luxury of plunging the weapon into the miscreant's heart. He had stepped out of his corner, and looked at the retreating party as the red glimmer of their lights could be seen fading away in the distance. From what he had heard he concluded that the subject of their remarks was the fate of the unfortunate counts, which had now been definitely settled; and shaking his fist at the retreating hangmen, he cried in a bitter voice:

"Oh that my country should ever be so deeply disgraced by one of her own sons!"

"Holloo! what have we here?" said a voice in Spanish behind him.

He turned round. A soldier, probably belonging to the party which had just passed, came running along, torch in hand, followed at a little distance by two others, with a second torch. He had arrived within two or three paces of Galama, and seemed uncertain what to do. The Frisian's attitude and face contrasted strongly with his dress; but his being alone, and that without either torch-bearer or attendant, seemed to settle the question in his mind to the detriment of Galama. He approached the Yonker, at the same time calling out to his companions to come on. Action with Karel was a thing which required but little consideration. He had gone through a great many dangers already, young though he was, and he was seldom at a loss what to do. He quietly awaited the soldier. Suddenly, when he had come near enough, he made himself, with a quick movement, master of the flaming torch. To strike the fellow with the burning end in the middle of the face, and, turning round, to flee before the two others, as he saw his aggressor fall under the heavy and unexpected blow, was the work of a moment. In another, the two other soldiers were in full pursuit; but they had reckoned without their host. After having run a little distance, in which Galama allowed his pursuers to come close to him,

he suddenly turned round, dashed between them, and fled as fast as he could in the opposite direction, towards the Coudenberg Gate.

He was aware that he was in great danger, but he did not lose his presence of mind. He knew that there was but one way which he could go, and that was to the right, through the little passage which ran along the Palace of Nassau, and which led into a labyrinth of little streets and lanes between the Chaussée and the High Street. If he kept on to the Chaussée, he knew that he would come to the gate, where the soldiers would find it easy to stop and arrest him. The left turning would bring him into the vicinity of the palace, which, being always surrounded by soldiers, would be more dangerous still. So, trusting to chance, he turned to the right, and fled along, with his pursuers panting and swearing behind him. But in his great speed he became less careful. He had not ran far when, making a false step, he stumbled, and came down heavily upon the earth. Scrambling upon one knee, and drawing his sword, he turned round to face his antagonists, who were coming along at a distance of several yards from each other. His first blow was aimed at the torch which the foremost of them carried in his left hand, while with his right he drew his sword. At the same instant that the naked blade shone in the light of the torch, a blow from Galama dashed the light to the ground, and presently the two swords were heard upon each other. The combat upon such unequal terms, however, would not have lasted long, had not an unexpected help extricated Karel from his highly dangerous position. At the moment that the second soldier arrived at the spot, and was ready to help his comrade, a dark figure, which seemed to have followed them, leaped like a tiger upon his back. The fellow uttered one short howl, or rather snort, and fell lifeless at the feet of his comrade. A moment afterwards the other one felt his legs knocked from under him, and measured his length on the ground at the feet of the astonished Galama.

The dark figure ran to his side, and seized him by the arm.

"Come along, Yonker, and let us get to the Rookery, for the game is getting dangerous," whispered a voice which he recognized to be that of Gerard Block, his new acquaintance.

"Not until I have thanked the preserver of my life," said Galama, seizing the other's hand. "May God reward you for the service which you have done me and my cause, noble Gerard; and now, whither?"

"Come along. I have got the watchword, as I promised; and the sooner we get outside the better, for there will be a pretty kettle of fish when any of these fellows come to again. I have had better success than I dared to hope for, and I have got some information that will serve us excellently. But let us get outside, for walls have ears, say I."

While saying, or rather whispering these words, he had seized Karel by the arm, and not long after both appeared in sight of the gate.

It seemed as if Gerard Block had been quite as successful in obtaining information as he had anticipated. When they arrived before the heavy and clumsy iron gate, they found it closed, and a soldier with a match-lock on his shoulder walking before it, while some dozen others could be seen playing at dice in the adjacent guard-house. The soldier on guard looked with a somewhat suspicious eye upon our two friends as they bore down upon him, and called out the sub-officer who was inside. As soon, however, as they saw the outfit of a Spanish officer, they became more respectful, and when Gerard Block passed the watchword, the door flew open, and the two Beggars stood outside the town. Galama drew a deep breath when the imminent danger had passed, but he was fully aware of their perilous position. For a moment he stood still, and considered how best to proceed, as he was certain that soldiers would be sent out to pursue them. Rain had begun to fall, and came down with ever-increasing violence.

"We have not much time to lose," said Block to him, as he remained motionless within a stone's throw of the gate; "let us first flee to the inn, and then to the Rookery."

"That would be a bad plan, indeed," answered Galama. "We are to be pursued, and the first places they will search will be the forest and the inn, whither, consequently, we must *not* go. Follow me."

He turned to the left, and ran along quickly and noiselessly, followed by Block. It was not long before they reached the bank of the Grelle, one of the numerous little branches into which the river Senne divides near the city. The two fugitives walked along the bank for some moments, until they reached a fordable spot, where they crossed, and arrived on a sort of island formed by the Grelle and another branch of the river.

"There is a small farmer on this island," said Galama, "who is a partisan of ours, and who will give us shelter for the night. But methinks I hear some one approaching. Let us lie down in the corn till he passes."

It was a false alarm, however, and the two men proceeded for some distance in silence. At last, the bark of a dog was heard, and Galama once more bade his companion hide in the corn while he went to the house to

reconnoitre. After having been absent for a short time he returned, and led Block to the house, where the old farmer and his wife, two honest and generous people, received them as drenched fugitives with every kind of welcome.

"I haven't got long to live, nor much to lose, your honor," he said to Galama, as he prepared for each of them a bed and a good supper; "but, please God, I'll give it all to Yonker Willem and his friends."

"Yonker Willem" was the familiar name which the people gave to the Prince of Orange; in later times, when the people really began to see what he had done, suffered, and sacrificed for their sakes, that title was altered into "Father Willem," by which he is known to the grateful Hollanders to this day.

Happily for the two Beggars, no one dreamed of coming to the lonely and insignificant though very much exposed farm, and that night and the following day they were perfectly safe, and burning with desire to discuss and execute the plans which they had made.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BEGGARS' HAUNT.

WE must now return to the inn, where Blois de Treslong and Hans were left behind. The host, who was a secret favorer of the Beggars, and a friend of the printe, was well known to all of them, and through him they often received very valuable information. In return for this the Beggars never molested—nay, secretly protected him; whereas they often proved a heavy scourge to those innkeepers who, whether from fear of the lawless band, or dread of discovery, showed no inclination to follow the example of mine host.

As soon as the two horsemen had disappeared, Hans returned to the stables, where he began to alter the trappings of his horse, and to look after his pistols, while he muttered to himself:

"What a vicious brute that was! I used to think myself a tolerably good rider, but I'm dashed if any one could ride *him* at all. That fellow Block could not manage him either, so that makes it all right. I wonder where my Lord de Treslong is. He hasn't surely gone back already—confound these pistols! they are of no use whatever—I hope he won't return to the Rookery without me, because I don't know but that I forget the exact way."

"Hans! Hans!" Treslong's voice here whispered.

Hans looked round, but could discover no one, until, having heard another call, he perceived an opening in the ceiling, through which, by means of a ladder, the hay-loft could be reached. Through this opening Treslong's face appeared.

"Come up as soon as you can. We must not be seen, and cannot very well leave until after dark. You had better take the trappings off your horse."

Hans obeyed these orders, and was soon up beside the chief, who had made himself

exceedingly comfortable in the hay, and invited Hans to sit down beside him, and take part of the wine with which he was regaling himself. Just at that moment bells were heard tinkling in the distance.

"Do you hear these?" said Treslong; "these bells have warned me not to go till it is dark. They belong to the transport vans, and it is quite possible that they are attended by a number of spies, who might follow us to our haunt. But what have you been about, that you have such a fine horse for yourself, eh?"

"Ah! it is a fine one, too, my lord, and no mistake," said Hans, greatly pleased; "it is a very vicious brute, I can assure you, and very few men *would* be able to ride it."

"So I thought," said Treslong, gravely, "when I saw your performance on it in the yard."

"That was Block's horse, not mine," said Hans, innocently; "it is an old brute; but unhappily the saddle got loose, you know, and I slipped off. But it could not be compared to mine, you know."

"Oh, indeed," answered Treslong; "I thought it was a vicious brute, and in fact, you know, I expected that nobody could ride him at all."

There was a twinkling in his eyes as he looked at Hans, who, finding that his confession to himself had been overheard, looked rather sheepish. Treslong laughed, but said good-naturedly:

"Never mind, Hans; your fall was by no means to be attributed to bad horsemanship. From the movements of the horse, I concluded that, wanting to play you a trick, Block or whatever his name be, put a beech-nut under the saddle, the irritation of which no horse can bear. So when it was brought back here I quietly told the hostler to repeat

the process, and you saw yourself that he experienced the same result as you did. So much for his tricks."

At this moment a bustle was heard in front of the house, and presently the yard at the back of the stables was filled with unsaddled horses tied together, and led by five or six dragoons.

"What a pity," whispered Treslong, "that I did not know of this! Had we been at Dirk's Castle to-night, we might have attacked these fellows on their way—they are sure to have a good sum of money about them—and we would have killed the horses, for they are destined for the coming expedition to Friesland."

Dirk's Castle was another and more frequented haunt of the Beggars, and lay not far from the present Waterloo.

"I do not suppose there will be anything doing to-night?" asked Hans. "Have you assembled all the Beggars at the Rookery, my lord?"

"Nearly all will be there by to-morrow," answered he; "but I do not like the place much for anything but a store-room. It is too near Brussels, and I do not know but that it is being already suspected. We must be very cautious. How have you and Yonker Galama fared of late? Have your perils been great?"

"The only blood I have seen for two months, my lord," said Hans, as calmly as if he were discussing his dinner, "was this morning. The trooper was quiet enough, but the captain would not give in, so what else could I do?"

It appeared, from his tale to Treslong, that they had followed a Spanish captain and his servant out of Ghent to a little inn, and there they had picked a quarrel with them, tied and gagged the servant, while the captain, who, as Hans said, would not give in, was killed or mortally wounded in the encounter. They had then appropriated the outfits, and thus disguised, proceeded on their way. Thus, even the most noble-minded men found themselves often constrained to spill the blood of their fellow-creatures, and, much against their will, to employ means from which they inwardly revolted. Yonker Galama had seen

the necessity of capturing the two men, but it was Hans who, having completed his task with the trooper, and exasperated at the captain's resistance, dealt with him in a manner which his coarser nature could not regard with such aversion.

While they were thus speaking, the door of the stable below was heard to open, and voices sounded through the floor of the loft. Treslong motioned Hans to be silent, and crept to the opening through which the latter had reached his present quarters, and which he had taken the precaution to close, after having drawn up the ladder. Treslong opened the trap-door for about an inch, and looked through. Notwithstanding the dusk, he could perceive the host in conversation with three men, who were enveloped in large cloaks, but whose helmets made them known as Spanish dragoons.

"You see, mine host," said one who appeared to be the most important, "we cannot reach Brussels to-night in good time, for it is more than seven miles yet, and we have travelled a good distance already. Besides, it is raining, and it is dark on the road. You must make room for our wagons in this stable, and those of our men who are not on guard must sleep in your hay-loft. Be not afraid—they shall do you no harm."

"Well, Sir Captain," answered the host, "I will serve you with all I have. Let your wagons be removed hither, and your men remain on guard. As to the others, they may sleep in my hay-loft, but they won't find any hay there to sleep in. I have not been able to find more hay than would suffice for the meal of two or three steeds. The grass has not been yet cut in the fields."

"Let them remain in the front room, then, and give us a separate room and plenty of wine and cards," was the officer's rejoinder, as he left the stable.

Treslong turned to Hans, and looked at him smilingly.

"We are nicely caught," he whispered: "the house is surrounded by Spanish dragoons, and we can't get out. What's to be done?"

This question, however, was answered by

the host himself, who came up to them by another door leading out of his own bedroom into the kitchen. He assured them that, thanks to his lie about the hay, no one would be likely to come up, and that they were at once safe and sheltered; for the rain was coming down in torrents; and several wagons, which, as the soldiers said, contained powder and money, were being rolled into the stable. Nor were Treslong and Hans sorry for being thus forced to remain in hay; for, had they gone that night to the Rookery, they would have had to walk five miles in pouring rain, and there would, after all, have been no certainty of getting shelter. They resolved to watch in turns; and when the next morning broke upon them, the Spaniards had already left, unaware that their deadliest enemies had been so near them.

As the road, however, was full of troops of soldiers, all going to the metropolis, Treslong deemed it advisable to wait until it was again dusk. When at last it came, they emerged from their place of shelter, and followed for some time the road Galama had taken the previous night. Then striking off to the right, they entered by a little path into the very midst of the dark and sombre wood, and proceeded cautiously and in absolute silence to the haunt of the Beggars.

It may not be out of place here to say a few words about the origin of this confederacy, which played so considerable a part in the history of the foundation of the Dutch Republic. We have seen how, much against his will, yet unable to resist the force of public opinion, Philip was obliged to recall Cardinal Granvelle. Those nobles, however, who had hoped that with him the Inquisition would leave the country, found themselves directly mistaken. It is true, it somewhat relaxed its violence, but it was there; and as long as it remained, the nobles and the people felt uneasy and indignant. They resolved to draw up a petition, or Request, in which the regent was humbly solicited to remove the so obnoxious Inquisition, and restore to the most loyal subjects of the king their ancient liberty and happiness.

On the 3d of April, 1566, three hundred

noblemen, headed by Count Louis of Nassau, and by Count Brederode, the brave, reckless, dissipated, yet kind-hearted and generous descendant of the old counts of Holland, walked in procession to the Castle of Brussels, where the Duchess of Parma, surrounded by her counsellors, received them. The Request was read, and the nobles withdrew to give the duchess an opportunity to consult her advisers. It was then that Berlaymont, her confidant, perceiving that the warlike and haughty appearance of the nobles had made a deep impression upon the duchess, said in a tone of disdain, "Of what, madam, should you be afraid? These are but a troop of beggars." This expression was heard by Brederode and a few others, and it sunk deeply into their hearts. On the evening of the 6th, an evasive answer having in the meantime been received from the regent, the nobles assembled in the magnificent Culemburg Palace, the mansion of Brederode, and partook of a splendid supper. Heated with wine, and yet indignant at the taunt, the eloquent and witty host rose up, when the cloth had been removed, and told the assembled guests by what name they had been called. As his speech reached its climax, his cup-bearer handed him a wooden mendicant's bowl. Filling it with wine to the brim, he raised it in the air, and then, with the exclamation, "*Vivent les Gueux!*" (Long live the Beggars!) he emptied it, and handed it to his neighbor.

He was answered by shouts and roars of applause. Each guest emptied the bowl in his turn, and repeated the cry. It was adopted as the war-cry, and the taunt was taken as the name of the new confederacy. And thus, though born as it were out of the fumes of wine, and nourished in its infancy by the inconsiderate and often foolish enthusiasm of its founders, the confederacy soon developed itself into maturity, and within a few years it presented to Alva, both on land and on sea, the form of a giant, who, like the genie in the Arabian tales, was all the more terrible because he was so seldom visible, and often dealt his fearful blows where they were least expected.

As we said at the commencement, when Alva came into this land, part of these nobles fled, and another part formed guerilla bands, retaining their old name of Beggars. That many of their followers adopted this name to be better able to ply their trade, which was no other than that of common highwaymen, was a matter of course, considering the state of the country. Still, notwithstanding this, they performed real service to the cause of liberty by intercepting letters and supplies, and keeping the prince informed of all that happened.

Many were the efforts made by Alva and his helpers to put down these bands, and to a certain extent they succeeded. But their great end—namely, to lay their hands on the prince's secret correspondence—they were totally unable to attain. Letters, it is true, were sometimes seized; but they were so disguised, and the names so arbitrary, that nothing could be made out of them. The duke, the Jesuits, the Inquisition, were at a loss. They knew that the thing was done almost before their eyes, yet they were unable to lay their hands upon the culprits. Such was the vigilance, the caution, of these otherwise reckless, debauched, and defiant fore-runners of the Dutch Republic, whose haunt we shall now enter at the side of our two friends, Treslong and Hans.

Though it was still early, it had grown quite dark in the forest. The sky was clouded, and it would have been impossible for any one not well acquainted with the locality to find his way through a mass of underwood, which, to all appearances, had never been disturbed by the hand of man. The two men, however, seemed to know their path perfectly.

Treslong leading, and Hans following, they proceeded cautiously, but swiftly. At one place they had to brush away the branches that almost obstructed their passage; at another spot they had to wade up to their ankles through a pool or marshy place; and here and there it seemed as if they could only proceed by cutting their way with the sword, when some unexpected turning, which both of them seemed to know almost by instinct, brought them on the path once more.

Suddenly, as they were thus proceeding, the harsh shriek of a barn-owl re-echoed through the wood, and the rustling of the leaves was heard as the frightened animal flew from its shelter. No sooner had Treslong heard this sound, however, than, putting his hand to his mouth, he gave vent to two clear and prolonged notes, such as the night-ingale utters, and paused to listen. A moment afterwards a dark form appeared from behind a stout tree about two or three yards in front of them.

"Who is with you?" whispered the figure, advancing to Treslong.

"An acquaintance of yours, Jonathan—Black Hans."

"Bravo!" said the figure, in accents of pleasure, seizing Hans's hand, and shaking it cordially. "How art thou, Hans? I have not seen thee for a while!"

"The owl is splendid to-night," said Hans, as he cordially greeted the guard who had been addressed as Jonathan. "Where is he?"

"The northern one is up in yonder tree. It is Thomas to-night."

Treslong and Hans now passed on. After having proceeded about a hundred yards, the sombre and indistinct form of what appeared to be a ruin rose amongst the underwood, at a spot where the larger trees had all been cleared away or had never existed. It was the Rookery. Some three hundred years ago it had been the castle of a plundering baron, who had made the forest the scene of his violence, and drawn many a victim either by fraud or by force within the immensely thick walls of his castle. Only two of these were now left, and even they were broken and rugged at the top. There was a large area covered with masses of stone and mortar, and overgrown with the ivy and brushwood, which plainly indicated that formerly the castle had stood there. The north and east walls, which were several feet in thickness, and a tower, apparently of but half its original height, were now the only remnants of the dwelling of the rich and mighty; but ruined, though it was, and decayed, its splendid halls had never been so greatly honored by the presence of its haughty, defiant, and wealthy owners as it

was now, when its vaults sheltered men who were one day to raise their country to a greater glory than ever, and who surpassed in all but wealth their famous predecessors.

Stealing cautiously along the above-mentioned area, Treslong directed his steps to the middle of the north wall, and at a spot which was completely covered with ivy, he halted and whistled softly. Suddenly a gleam of light appeared through the ivy, and a voice whispered "Watchword !"

The answer was given, and a summons to pass followed. The light disappeared, and pushing away the ivy, the two men entered an aperture in the wall, which gave access to a long and narrow passage, at least three-score yards in length. At the entrance, they found the man who had carried the light, which at closer sight appeared to be only a burning match, and who gave them as hearty a welcome as his colleague Jonathan had done.

"Have you laid a new train of powder?" asked Treslong of the sentry.

"Ay, ay, my lord, and I'll undertake to send a whole regiment of Spaniards back to Spain with it, in no time, if they try to walk about here. Is there any one else coming?"

"Yes, two more—Yonker Galama and another."

Treslong passed on; and arriving at the end of the passage, he stooped down and felt about for a moment. Suddenly the ground before them seemed to open, and a volume of light and sounds of laughter and merriment rose through the chasm. Treslong then descended a ladder, and Hans, following his example, took care to close and bolt the immensely thick trap-door that had given them entrance.

The apartment which they had entered was an oblong quadrangle, with a vaulted roof. It had been one of the prison-vaults of the old castle. Massive iron rings could still be seen in the walls. It was partly situated under the tower, and a mine or train of gunpowder had been laid by the Beggars in such a manner that the roof of the vault could be blown up, and receive as a crowning piece of destruction the tottering walls of the tower.

Another and smaller vault, the entrance to which had been hung with a velvet curtain, had a door which opened into a long passage, and provided a safe exit in case of surprise.

The first vault was about fifteen yards long, and ten broad. A large wooden board, supported by two huge stones, served as a table in the middle. Two lamps, which looked as if they had belonged to some church, were hung up at each end.

At the side of the table nearest the ladder, five men, between forty and sixty years of age, and of a grave and dignified appearance, were engaged in a discussion which was interrupted by the entrance of our two friends. At the other end, a totally different group was seen. There the floor was covered with straw, and on it, reclining in different positions, lay sixteen men of all ages and appearances. A more picturesque group it would not be possible to conceive. Here lay a thin, delicate-looking youth, with the blouse of the rough farmer around him; there a jovial and purple-nosed soldier was dressed in a monk's cowl, and drinking wine out of a silver censer, which had apparently been carried away from some altar. In one corner, a broad-shouldered fellow was cleaning and polishing a cuirass, and vigorously applying his chalk and water out of a baptismal font; in another, a figure lay unconscious in sleep, though his flushed cheeks, his irregular breathing, and the bandages around his head showed that this sleep was produced by a wound fever; by his side, as if in direct contradiction to the moral which he taught, another Beggar was sharpening his sword. The table was covered with weapons of every description, and various dishes of silver or other metal, which constituted part of the plunder of churches, abbeys, and convents, lay amongst them. The light, as it shone upon this motley group and upon the curtain before the entrance of the second vault, displayed indeed a very curious and picturesque scene. Most of them were passing their time in joking with each other, and in playing at dice.

It was natural that each of the two men who entered the place should join that party with which his rank and disposition most

agreed. Thus, after having respectfully saluted the five men nearest the ladder, Hans walked to the other side of the table, where he was cordially and somewhat uproariously received by his more jovial and numerous associates, with whom he seemed a great favorite, and who speedily assigned him a place in their midst.

"Has any one brought any new intelligence from Brussels since I have been away?" asked Treslong of an elderly man of a dignified and somewhat sad appearance, whose name was Verveen.

"Not that I am aware of," answered he; "but I suppose there is very little doubt now about the execution taking place to-morrow or the day after. But I thought you were going to bring Yonker Galama with you; where is he?"

"He has gone on to Brussels, and will be back here within a short time. He has procured the costume of a Spanish officer, and has little to fear. He will be able to give us the best information; for he is going to the Broodhuys, where, as I suppose you are aware, he knows the warder and his daughter."

"I do not suppose he will show himself to the warder," said the first speaker; "but has the Yonker no news from the prince? I heard that he was going to reinforce Count Louis in Friesland; for if it be true that Alva is going thither himself, the count will have a hard battle to fight. He is not a match for the duke, I fear. He is too young and impatient."

"That is just what spoils every one of our undertakings, and I am afraid will spoil our whole cause," said another, opposite him, impatiently. He had a martial appearance, but his face indicated that he possessed none of the independence and originality of Treslong, and that, excellent though he might be as a servant, he was but ill-fitted for the post of commander. He was a scion of the ancient family of Van Hagendorp, and had been one of the presenters of the Request. "I know," he continued, "that nine out of the ten inhabitants throughout the provinces would at once declare openly for the prince, if we

could but get an able general, in whose abilities we could put our trust. But now, who is to blame them if they do not respond to the call, when, as we have seen in the case of that traitor Villars, the whole band is cut to pieces by an enemy of half its number?"

"Nobody says they are to blame, my dear Van Hagendorp," said Treslong; "but—"

He was interrupted by a burst of laughter from the other end of the table. Turning his eyes in that direction, he saw Hans sitting on a wine barrel, clothed in a beautifully embroidered mass-chasuble, while he pretended to read or chant out of a book in his hand. The Beggars around him seemed highly delighted, and laughed and chuckled at the ridiculous figure before them.

Treslong gave three smart raps upon the table with the hilt of his dagger, and said, in the silence which was thereby occasioned, "I hope the confederates will not forget that our cause is a sacred one, that we are within three miles of Brussels, and that it is most unadvisable to make an unnecessary noise; we should recollect our business here is not pleasure."

Seeing that his words produced their desired effect, he continued his interrupted answer to Van Hagendorp:

"I do not blame the people for not rising; but what I blame them for is, that they do not contribute their money more profusely. You know very well that the prince was greatly disappointed in finding that he had received barely half the amount which was absolutely required for levying an army. And how can you expect a good general to consent to take the command of an army, when he knows that within a month the troops will become mutinous for want of pay? Why, if the people dread being imprisoned or executed, because their wealth makes an object of desire for the duke, why do they not give it to work out their own safety? Count Louis might be marching on towards Brussels now, if his troops were not in mutiny."

"Do you think that we may expect help from France?" said Verveen, who was more of a politician, and had occupied the post of secretary to one of the influential nobles.

"The king has made peace with the Huguenots, and seems favorably disposed towards us. De Coligny has great military talent, and might persuade him to help us if he knew that we would acknowledge him as lord of the provinces."

"And would you?" asked a fourth, whose dress was a mixture between the civil and the military, and whose face, when he spoke, shone with enthusiasm and life. In him the priest and the warrior were united. He had preached to great assemblies, and had been the means in God's hands of bringing the truth home to many; but, having no opportunity at present, he was content to take up the sword, and defend those liberties which he proclaimed. "Would you accept help on that condition? I would as lief have Philip. If it were purely civil liberty we were fighting for, it would still be doubtful; for France is not the country, nor are the De Medici the family to allow us to manage our own affairs. But one of our great reasons—nay, the greatest—is liberty of religion; and *that*, you must acknowledge, they would not grant."

"And has not the king granted it to the Huguenots?" asked Verveen.

"For how long?" said the other. "For a month, for a year, perhaps. Believe me, Master Verveen, as long as a king or a sovereign has a power above him which he must obey, such as that of the Pope, he cannot perpetually allow liberty of any kind. And besides, in a country where the acts of a sovereign are so entirely arbitrary, who knows but the next king might annul all our mutual agreements, supposing we had made any. No, if we have to get foreign aid, let us not seek it there. Let it come from the free, from the Protestant England and its queen."

"I tell you"—the voice of Hans was here heard—"I am a different fellow from what you think. When I was at Dillenburg last, the prince says to me, 'Well, Hans, what would you advise?' 'Well, your Highness,' said I, 'I would send one army under your Highness's brother into Friesland, and another under some first-rate fellow, into Brabant. Alva cannot fight them both, and perhaps will not fight either. But,' said I, 'do

not take Villars, because he is no good.' 'Oh, yes,' said he, 'Villars is all right.' 'Very well,' said I, 'we'll see.' And who was right, eh? I can assure you now—"

He paused; for as he sat with his back to Treslong, he had entirely forgotten him; but now, by the ironical smiles, the winks, and the silence of his listeners, he perceived that he was the centre of all observation. He looked round, and at that moment all in the cave but himself burst out into a laugh, which, considering that he was the object of it, he bore with great calmness and magnanimity.

"What a conceited fool that fellow is!" whispered Verveen, with scorn, as soon as the laugh had been silenced, or at least subdued.

"I wish I had some more of these fools, Master Verveen," said Treslong. "He is given to bragging, it is true, but it is quite harmless, and I know of no more faithful, intelligent, or honest member of our confederacy."

"And it is possible," said the preacher, "that upon such ground, the seed of God may bear good fruit; for I am perfectly assured that with many of the fellows round about him, it would be choked by the thorns in a day."

"To resume our conversation," said Verveen, to whom this allusion seemed distasteful, "you recommend Queen Elizabeth as a help, and you were pleased to call her Protestant and free. But may be, you know not that, Protestant though she be, she has refused to help the Huguenots in France, and yet I am sure she would rather wage war against France than against Spain. She is, perhaps, not so relentless and hateful as her sister, but she has little affection for our brethren, the Puritans."

"And yet, Master Verveen," said Treslong, "if I understand rightly my friend Marnix de St. Aldegonde,* her principal adviser, Sir William Cecil, with whom Marnix seems to be intimate, is not by any means so averse to these Puritans as she is; and I am assured that if we do put ourselves under her protection, we shall eventually be delivered from

* See Appendix.

this yoke, and enjoy a thousand times greater liberty than we do now. You must not forget that Queen Elizabeth is in a very difficult position at this moment, and that she has shown nothing but kindness and benevolence to those of our countrymen who have been able to escape to her dominions. She may not be a Puritan, but she is most decidedly not a Catholic."

Here their conversation was again interrupted by the other Beggars, who, perhaps somewhat heated with wine, had formed a circle round two of their companions, who were proceeding to attack each other with their swords, by way of pastime. The opinions as to their comparative merit seemed to be divided, for there was a great deal of encouragement on both sides, though but little noise was made. Treslong, however, who

foresaw that it might become a cause of quarrel, had just made up his mind to put a stop to it, when the shrill cry of the owl penetrated into the vault.

The effect was electric. Every one seemed to know his particular duty. The lamps were taken down, and kept in such a manner that they might be extinguished in a moment. Every one rose and listened, with his hand on his sword or pistol, and not a sound was made. The opening to the other vault had been cleared, and showed a ready exit in case retreat was necessary. Suddenly two knocks were heard overhead, and immediately the lamps were restored to their former position.

A moment afterwards, the trap-door was opened, and Treslong, who had gone up, reappeared, followed by our two acquaintances, Yonker Galama and Gerard Block.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ELECTION.

FOR a moment after their entrance, there reigned a dead silence, and the whole band being now assembled, its members drew, as by instinct, closer together, and ranged themselves round the table. Those of them who had hitherto passed their time in jest and carousal were now attentive and respectful, for they knew that the time for action was at hand. The roving life which they led, the frequent changes and dangers, the little though strict discipline, and the desperate undertakings in which they engaged at a moment's notice, had forced them to accustom themselves to all situations, and to sleep, eat, joke, or fight, at any time, without being influenced by the rapidity with which these actions succeeded each other.

Treslong, Galama, Block, and the five other chiefs had taken their stand at the head of the table. The rest took their place around, and all eyes were turned upon Galama, from whom the great news was expected, which was to decide what was to be done. And as he stood there, with his fair locks hanging around his pale features, his eyes shining with hope and enthusiasm, and his lips parted with a smile, as he saw all eyes turned upon him, he looked the personification of undaunted courage and noble patriotism.

"I have first to introduce to your notice, gentlemen, a new member of our confederacy," said Galama, in a clear voice, after he had greeted his particular friends cordially, and conversed with them for some moments. "He has been sent to us by our friend, Peter Blink, who, as we all know, is very active in promoting our interests in the province of Holland, and who has sent him to me with a written introduction, in which he assures us that Gerard Block, for such is his name, will be of great service to us, as he has known Brussels from his childhood. I need not ask

you, Master Block, whether you have taken the oath of allegiance to his Majesty the King of Spain as the count of these provinces, to the Prince of Orange as his lawful and sole representative, and to our confederacy as their faithful and loyal support."

Block, thus addressed, bowed his head in token of assent.

Many of the Beggars, however, looked at him with unwilling if not suspicious eyes. Galama saw this, and hastened to remove their suspicions.

"If any doubt of his fidelity to our cause had still lingered in my mind," he continued, "it would have disappeared by this time; for I must tell you that within the few hours that I have known him, he has already endangered his own life to save mine. Indeed, I have little doubt that, but for his timely and courageous help, I should have been swinging on the gallows in Brussels within a few days."

The Beggars looked kindlier at Block, and Galama proceeded: "I must now call your attention to the heavy blow which threatens all of us at this moment. The manner in which the most sacred and tender ties which can bind human beings together have been severed by the bloody servants of the duke and his predecessors, who, under the pretext of protecting the most holy Church, have destroyed our homes, and robbed our properties, need not be here enlarged upon. I do not believe there is one amongst you who is not smarting under some heavy and cruel blow, who has not lost some beloved relation or friend, and seen him die like the meanest and deadliest of malefactors."

He paused, and his face assumed for a moment a tender expression, as he thought of her who had impressed him so deeply with the nobility with which she looked upon these wrongs. Then he proceeded:

"But it is not vengeance that we are now contemplating. It is a service to our cause, an act for promoting our sacred liberty, which we are called upon to execute. All of you will remember in how base and treacherous a manner the Duke of Alva possessed himself, nine months ago, of the persons of the two Counts, Egmont and Horn. When the rumor spread through the length and breadth of the land, that they had been imprisoned, it was not believed. But when day by day the report was confirmed, and when even the king was said to have given his consent, the most unbelieving began to fear that it was true. Shall I remind you of the immense services which they, and especially the Count Egmont, have rendered the king? Shall I speak of the brilliant and valiant exploits by which, at the beginning of his reign, his arms redeemed their somewhat tarnished glory? Has not the whole world repeated with admiration the name of Lamoral? and do not our neighbors, the French, at this moment, remember with shame the names of St. Quentin and Gravelines? And how, think you, are his services to be rewarded? This morning, his public and private enemy, the duke, resolved to have him and his friend and fellow-prisoner, Count Horn, beheaded publicly, on the market-place in the front of the Broodhuys, and that to-morrow morning."

He paused, and looked round the assembled Beggars. The piece of news, which had spread like lightning through the town, and had, in fact, been known some time before, though up to that day its confirmation was not official, seemed to be known to most of the confederates, and a deepening of the gloom upon their brow, as they looked at each other, at Galama, or on the floor, was their only response.

"Almost the whole time during which the two counts were confined in Ghent," continued Galama, "I was secretly engaged in endeavoring to liberate them; but all my efforts failed completely. At last, I was informed that they were to be removed to Brussels for execution. I sent you word, for it is possible that we may effect here what proved impossible at Ghent. I need not tell

you of what immense value the Count of Egmont would be to our cause, and what great assistance he would be to our glorious chief, the Prince of Orange. His military talents, which match those of Alva himself, the adoration in which he is held by the people, and especially by the soldiers, would make him the greatest support of the prince and his brother. I went inside Brussels, last night, in company with Master Block, and both of us learnt a great many particulars, which make our case at once more easy and more difficult. Let our friend Block first relate to us what he heard. I shall afterwards give you my story."

All eyes were now turned upon Block, who said, in a very calm manner:

"The information which I have been able to obtain, though not very extensive, is important and reliable; having been given to me by my own cousin, who occupies the post of one of the duke's chamberlains, and who is secretly on our side. Through him I know that a rising in the city, in order to effect the liberation of the counts, will be a total impossibility, even if we were a hundred times our present number. Two thousand men are to be drawn up on the square, and two companies will patrol the streets during the execution; so that even if the burghers did assist us, we could effect nothing in that way. But the unfortunate burghers are so stricken down, so discouraged, and altogether so afraid, that I do not think we would get ten people to listen to us. Alva has sent for the Bishop of Ypres, who is with him now, I suppose, and who has to go to Count Egmont at twelve o'clock to-night, and acquaint him with his approaching end. He is closely guarded, and unless some means or other be found to liberate him, the greatest general of his age, and the man who could help our cause more than almost any other, will be a corpse within four-and-twenty hours."

The last words were spoken in a low and tremulous tone, and the impression which they created was very deep. It was to be seen that every one present felt the leaden hand of the impending calamity press heavily upon him. Treslong, who saw this impres-

sion too, frowned, and resolved to alter it if possible. Quickly taking up the word, he said cheerfully :

"We are surely not going to despond because our enemies at present are stronger than we are, because we have no army to oppose theirs. We know that one of their armies has just been defeated in Friesland, by an enemy about half its number ; who knows but that we may defeat them somehow with less than that ? We can try, at any rate ; and I, for one, have made up my mind to it, though I die in the attempt. When Yonker Galama arrived, I thought I saw his face lit up with a smile of hope. We have not heard his story yet. Perhaps the burghers are not so downcast, after all ; and perhaps, if they knew that we were present, they might be induced to risk a rescue. What is your news, Yonker ?"

Having been already informed by Galama as to the result of his going to Brussels, his words had the desired effect. The men awaited with the greatest interest what Galama was to communicate.

"You are right, my lord," said Karel, "and you, too, Master Block. I fear, indeed, that the poor burghers of Brussels have suffered too much to run the risk of being beaten by the Spanish soldiers. But still there are some amongst them who know not what fear is. Last night I visited the Broodhuys, the place where the two counts are confined, and it seems that there is some hope of one of us being able to liberate Count Egmont ; but Count Horn, I am afraid, is beyond our reach. But the attempt is fraught with peril, and must moreover be made with great caution, in order to involve no one but ourselves in any danger. One of us must go, dressed as a friar of the Dominicans, to the Broodhuys, where he will be conducted through a host of sentries to the garret. Thence he must descend the large chimney into Count Egmont's room, and in some noiseless way disable the sentry. The count then will change clothes with his liberator, and in this disguise leave the prison, while the other makes his best way from the garret to the adjoining fish-market. One of us, meanwhile,

must scale the wall of the town, surprise the sentry, let the others in, and, at the moment that the count approaches, attack the guards, and open the gate, which is not difficult. Those of us who have horses will accompany the count on his flight to France ; with the others it will be *saure qui peut*. This is my plan, and the only one which has yet the slightest chance of success. It is a desperate undertaking, and I hardly suppose any of you will become a volunteer. Consider the dangers well. He who goes to the Broodhuys must put but little value on his life ; for the escape once discovered will involve his almost certain death, and that of—"

His voice faltered, but he quickly recovered himself. There was dead silence amongst the Beggars. At last Treslong said :

"Who volunteers for the post of surprising the sentry on the wall ?"

"I do."

It was Block. He stood erect, and looked round the circle.

"I would not be so bold, my lord," he said, "but that I have known Brussels from my very childhood, and have climbed almost every inch of the wall before the town was in a state of siege. Well do I know the place near the gates, where I used to wade the moat, and creep through a sewer to the other side. It is still there, and I will stake my life on its being accomplished to-night."

It seemed, however, as if both Treslong and the other confederates were still hesitating how to receive so daring an offer from one who had only that night come amongst them, and was personally known to no one. Block perceived this.

"I do not doubt," he said, "that there are many amongst you who look with some sort of suspicion upon my offer. But let me briefly give you the reasons that prompt me. We have only three hours and a half in which to do everything, as after that the Bishop of Ypres is to be with the prisoner. Nobody would be of the slightest use for the post to which I have volunteered, except one perfectly acquainted with the walls and everything belonging to them. One attempt failing, we need not try a second ; for the sen-

tries, after having been put on their guard, are not to be duped. So all depends upon one stroke. If any one thinks he can do better than I can, I am willing to let him go. But my hands burn to pay back a little of the debt, the fearful debt, which I owe them."

He spoke rapidly, and as it seemed with deep feeling. He had gained his object, and saw with satisfaction that many of them gave a nod of assent after he had spoken. Treslong seemed to think for a moment, and then looked up.

"Yes," he said, "it is better as it is. I had thoughts of taking the post myself; but, after all, I believe I am better fitted for the friar. I have not forgotten all my Latin, and I am weary of this life of idleness. So who can get me a cowl?"

But here he met with a violent opposition. None of the Beggars would consent to his taking that post. Some remarked that he must stay behind to lead them to the walls—others, that he must remain to keep order, as no other could take his place. Some made laughing comments upon his unclerical appearance, and protested that he would never pass the gates. Treslong seemed to hesitate.

"What say *you*, Yonker?" he said, turning to Galama.

A heavy struggle had in the meantime been going on in Galama's breast. He burned to offer himself for the post, and yet his promise to Agnes closed his mouth. He stood with compressed lips and flushed cheeks. When the chief addressed him, he fetched a deep breath, but said not a word.

There was a moment's silence among the confederates, during which some seemed uncertain how to interpret the Frisian's conduct. At last Block spoke in a low and somewhat humble tone.

"Pardon me, my Lord de Treslong; but, in my opinion, the objections which have been raised against your going are not without ground. Your face is known to almost every inhabitant of Brussels; for the gallant companion of the brave Brederode will not be forgotten by any Dutchman. And why should you go? The noble Yonker at my side is, I am sure, burning with desire to fill the post of

honor. He knows the Broodhuys, he can speak Latin, and he is at least more of a friar in his appearance than you, my lord; and that he is not wanting in courage and presence of mind, the little affair of last night has shown me."

The proposal thus given by Block was received by all the confederates with the loudest tokens of satisfaction which they dared give. There were only two exceptions—Treslong and Hans. Hans was silent, and looked with a sombre scowl at Block. Treslong, on the other hand, openly expressed his disapproval; but the Beggars, with whom Galama's qualities seemed to be well known, negatived all his objections, and the Yonker himself agreed to the proposal with the utmost pleasure. He seized Block's hand cordially, and then turning to Treslong, said:

"Come, my lord, let us waste no more words. I go, and please God I shall send you the count within an hour or two. I shall make my best way out; and if I fail, I shall die with pleasure, so the count be freed. Get me a friar's cowl, Hans, and help me to take off these things; for it is growing late, and every moment is precious. Only this I must yet say, The count shall halt at the corner of Little Cross Street. He shall whistle twice, and pass the word 'Liberty.' The rest of you must arrange it among yourselves. Where is Hans?"

He was told that Hans had gone into the other vault, to find suitable outfit, and in order to lose no time he lifted up the curtain, and joined him.

Hans was standing amongst a disorderly heap of clothes of every imaginable kind, with which the floor of the second vault was covered. A good stock of arms was suspended on the walls, and two or three barrels in a corner contained the two most necessary things for the Beggars—wine and powder. The moment he saw his master, he put down the lamp which he held in his hand, and unbuckled Galama's cuirass, as this would be but ill-suited for the underclothing of a confessor. He then bent down, as if looking for some articles of dress; but in reality he was closely examining the cuirass and the em-

broidered band to which Galama's sword had been attached. Though the examination lasted but for a moment, it seemed to satisfy Hans; for he put the two articles aside, and stood erect as if in momentary thought.

His master watched him with some interest; for Hans was as much his friend as his servant, and there were times when his advice was as valuable, and his views as clear, as those of the most intelligent; and many an ingenious suggestion of his had been attended with the best results. He now stood looking at his master with an expression upon his face as if he knew he must say something hard, and as if that something was at the same time difficult to say. All traces of frolic and careless gayety had vanished, and his dark eyes were shining with a steady and thoughtful fire.

"Well, Hans," asked Karel, "what are you thinking of?"

"Hem! Yonker, I was thinking of the count," answered Hans, slowly, "and of how he will feel to-morrow about this time."

"Is that all?" said Galama. "Give me the friar's cowl. He will feel extremely comfortable, when he is on the other side of the frontier."

"May be he will not feel at all," said the servant, bending down once more, and tossing in the dresses about.

"How so?" asked the master; "you seem to be particularly unhelpful about this affair."

"Well, Yonker, you know it is dangerous. First, you know, they know your face by this time at the gate, and they will think it queer that an officer comes dressed as—"

"I know the watchword. Make haste, will you?"

"Then there's Mistress Agnes," continued Hans, as if speaking to himself.

"Agnes is perfectly aware of what is going to happen," interrupted Karel, impatiently.

"And I do not suppose she will be as cool and as considerate as she ought to be, and may be she will cry again, and then the whole thing will come out, and we shall lose—"

"We shall lose all our time if we stand talking here," said Galama, growing more and more impatient. "Give me the cowl, or

make haste if you have not got it yet. It must be nearly nine by this time, and I must be there at ten."

"Now, Yonker," said Hans, with some hesitation in his voice, "I really—I don't think, you know—you shouldn't—you—mustn't—"

"What do you mean?" cried Galama, stamping with his foot. "Are you going to keep me here all night, or what? Give me that cowl instantly, or let me find it myself. I dare say I can dispense with your services."

The Yonker saw perfectly what Hans was aiming at, and it is possible that a voice within him whispered that the faithful fellow was quite right. That, at any rate, would be sufficient to explain why, obstinate Frisian as he was, he resolved to follow his own plan. But if Galama could be obstinate, Hans could be firm.

"Dash it all, Yonker!" he said determinedly, as he threw away a monk's cowl, and looked his master fairly in the face, "do you not see that you cannot go? What is the good of being obstinate, when the fate of Count Egmont, Mistress Agnes, and your sister depend upon it? I'm not going to say that you are not cool enough at other times, but I will stake my life you will not be this time, when you have to be there by the side of Mistress Agnes and your sister."

"That remains to be seen," said Karel, haughtily stretching forth his hand. "I thank you for your consideration, and I will allow that your reflections upon my courage spring purely and only from noble motives. But since I have been chosen for this post, I shall not shrink from it; and, difficult though it be, the difficulty is appreciated both by Agnes and myself, and I feel naught but honor at the trust which the confederates put in me. Give me the cowl!"

"Och!" said Hans, almost in the tones of a father, "the confederates would not have put that trust in you if they knew what I know. They do not know you, and they do not know Mistress Agnes, and they do not know that she has been weeping the color out of that scarf too. Come, Yonker, you cannot deny that either she or your sister, or

both, have been crying over you, and I know they could do a good deal of it a year ago. A woman is a woman, and I'm dashed if she will ever turn anything else; if she cried to-night already, what will she do when she has to go through danger with you? One will be so afraid for the other, that you'll both be caught without fail."

But it was no use. With an expression of insulted dignity upon his face, Galama tore the dress out of his servant's hands, and notwithstanding his remonstrances, he proceeded to put it on. Hans shook his head, and turning round, he walked to the entrance of the first vault, and lifted the curtain. The place had become quite altered. The table had been put on one side, the blocks of stone deposited in a corner. Gerard Block had already set out on his enterprise, and the Beggars were busily preparing themselves for the undertaking. As Hans put his head through the opening between the two vaults, he perceived, almost touching him, Treslong, Verveen, and the preacher in earnest conversation together, and he immediately tapped the chief on the arm. Treslong turned round, and seemed rather astonished to find Hans.

"Hoping you will excuse me, my lord," said he, respectfully, "but the Yonker is rather obstinate, and I think you are the only one who can make him listen to reason. You must not let him go to the Broodhuys, for he is sure to make a mess of it. I cannot make anything of him."

Treslong smiled, and looked at the other two men, while he said, "You see my fears are well grounded. Just let us go to him;" and the three men went into the vault where Galama was still busy, followed by the astonished and delighted Hans.

"I have been thinking, Yonker Galama," said Treslong, calmly, and with a tone of authority, "that you are, after all, not the best fitted of us for this enterprise. I think you told me that your sister was staying at the Broodhuys, and that you are well acquainted with the warder and his daughter, all of which are so many reasons why you should not go. Remember, that it is not glory you go for, but Egmont."

Karel Galama, who stood totally equipped in a friar's cloak and a rosary on his girdle, frowned when he heard these words, his cheeks turned pale, and on his lips there played a smile of haughty defiance. The idea of going to Brussels again, and braving the danger by the side of Agnes, of defending her whom he loved so deeply, and of dying for her and for Count Egmont, was so pleasing, so romantic, so seductive for him, that he was ready to resist even Treslong's authority. But glancing at the chief's calm and commanding features, he reflected that he had had far more experience, and possessed, at any rate, the power to retain him; and, remembering what Agnes had said to him, he resolved to give in. Thus, after a moment's silence, he said in a low voice,—

"I place myself at your lordship's command."

Treslong extended his hand, and shook Galama's cordially. He understood fully what had passed in the youth's mind; and, resolved as he was to be obeyed, he appreciated the spirit in which his words had been received.

"The next question is, who shall go in your stead?" asked Verveen.

"I might as well, since I have been at that work before," said Hans, stepping from a corner of the vault whither he had withdrawn. He was dressed the same way as his master; but, being stouter and fuller in the face, he presented so exactly the appearance of a monk, that even Galama smiled; and when with a low voice he repeated, "*Ave Maria, ora pro nobis*," the dissimulation was complete.

"He's our man," said Verveen: "he knows the Broodhuys as well, and the ladies less intimately than you do, Yonker;" and he playfully poked him in the side.

After some discussion, Treslong consented, and Hans was fully informed what he was to do. Some barrels and clothes having been removed silently and quickly, Treslong pressed on an iron knob, and a door, wide enough to allow one man to pass, opened in the wall, and gave access to a passage of the same dimensions. Hans entered it with the

urning lamp in one hand and a dagger in the other, and disappeared.

For a few moments the men looked in silence at the open door, through which the cold night air entered the vault. The glimmer of the light became fainter and fainter. At last it vanished, and the shriek of an owl was heard, disturbing the stillness of the night. Treslong stepped forward, and closing the door, he hid it again with the dresses and the casks. Then turning round to Galama, who had remained, in his thoughtful position, with his hands crossed over his breast, he said, pointing to the door—

“God watch over that fellow, and bring him back in safety; for, noisy and bragging though he be, no truer or more faithful servant ever trod this earth.”

And Galama bowed his head, and softly said, “Amen.”

The four men now returned to the first cave, where a great change had taken place amongst the confederates. The fantastic dresses of some, the defective or shabby equipments of others, were put aside. Each sought out what he wanted, and supplied it as best he could. Iron helmets were exchanged for the famous felt hat, the girdle was charged with pistols and dagger—every superfluous article of dress was laid aside, and deposited in the store-room. It was not long before most of them were ready, and standing in a group under the lamp in the middle of the vault. Treslong, whose dress had ever been simple, had watched the whole proceeding attentively, giving a direction here, an advice there, and shortly explained to the somewhat astonished Beggars why they saw Galama amongst them instead of Hans. When everything was ready, he stepped into their midst.

“Comrades,” he said, in a low but distinct voice, “this is probably the last night that we shall be together in this neighborhood. We are on the eve of a great day, and a few words as to our future line of conduct may not be amiss. It is possible that our scheme for the liberation of Count Egmont may succeed. If so, most of you will follow me in his defence on his flight across the frontiers.

But it is as possible that it may fail. In that case you must take your own counsel. I shall endeavor to make my way to the army of Count Louis. I have heard that Alva has issued orders to move towards Friesland as soon as the execution is over. There will be plenty of fighting, therefore, and every man will be welcome in our army. Those, however, who think they will do better by remaining here can do so, though I would not advise it. This place is being suspected by the Spaniards, and some day you may be caught in it. At any rate, should our attempt fail to-night, and we be obliged to flee into the forest, let no one flee hither, nor appear in its neighborhood, until to-morrow evening. In case we are unsuccessful, my command over you is at an end, and I place it in the hands of Yonker Galama. Let me thank you here heartily for the manner in which all of you have supported me. Remember always the great cause in which you are engaged. Think that the eyes of the whole world are upon you, and disgrace not by any mean or ignoble act the name of our confederacy, or of its illustrious chief, the Prince of Orange. Let us drink at parting a bumper to his health and our success, and then let us move.”

The bumpers were soon filled. The cry, “*Vivent les Gueux!*” was repeated softly, the prince was blessed, Treslong was cheered, and the duke’s name repeated with a curse.

“We must go separately,” continued Treslong; “we shall meet at the outskirts of the wood, at the corner of the road to Ixelles, about a hundred yards from the gate. Yonker van Hagendorp, lead the van.”

Van Hagendorp mounted the ladder, and his footsteps were heard in the passage. A few moments afterwards the owl’s shriek was heard, and a second man left. In a short time the vault was cleared. Treslong and Galama were the last to leave. They were saluted by the man with the burning match, who had kept a continuous watch the whole night.

“You have kept excellent watch, Frank. Take this, and keep it in remembrance of me, and give this to the two owls,” said Tres-

long, giving the sentry some golden ducats. "Not one of us is to be here till to-morrow night at least, so you can take some rest. In case the place be attacked in our absence, the warning cry is that of the wild-cat. All the rest remains as it is. Good-by. We shall see you no more."

"Are you going to leave us, my lord?" said the man, sinking down on one knee, and kissing his chief's hand with reverence. "I am afraid that our place of shelter will not remain long unknown. In that case, if both you and the Yonker go away, the band will be as a body without a head."

"I shall return here, at any rate," said Yonker Galama; "I am resolved not to go to Count Louis. I shall first wait here to see whether Hans returns. If, however, I find that there is no chance of that, I shall make arrangements here, and resume my old business, that of letter-carrier between the prince and Master Paulus Buys. It was at his desire, partly, that I came hither; and I have done him too many services not to be missed. So good-by only for the present, I hope." And parting the ivy before the entrance, the two men stepped into the area.

The night was very dark. Black masses of clouds hid the stars from view, and scarcely anything could be distinguished even at the distance of a foot. The weather was excellently suited to the occasion. Silently the two men followed the path which led towards the city, and heard with a smile how the sentry in the air saluted them at their departure with a series of owl-shrieks, which were as natural as they were shrill.

After having thus walked silently and cautiously for rather more than half an hour, they halted. They found themselves at the outskirts of the forest, and at about a thousand yards from the walls of the city. The distance between the city and the spot where they at present stood was covered with low underwood, with only an occasional group of trees, the larger trees having been cut down for building purposes. It was the most dangerous spot of all, for a person could be easily seen rising above the low bushes, while but little shelter was afforded by the few strag-

gling trees. All precautions, however, were taken. Bending low, they moved on slowly and softly, until presently they arrived at the last group of trees, where the road to Ixelles is crossed by that going to the little village of St. Giles, and by the other numerous cross-roads which intersect the forest. A group of men were assembled under the trees, and could be indistinctly seen amongst the slender stems.

"Are we all here?" asked Treslong. He was answered by a soft "Yes."

The names were called out, and the owners responded in turn.

"Lie down in the bushes, and you, Jonathan, go and reconnoitre. Gerard must be opposite this spot, if he is anywhere. Give three low and short whistles, which he will answer in the same manner; wade through the moat, and he will throw down a rope. Tie this rope-ladder to it, and come back here."

The command was given sharply and softly, and a moment afterwards Jonathan—the same who had formerly addressed Treslong and Hans—stole like a cat through the darkness, and disappeared.

"Attention," whispered Treslong. The confederates moved closer to him. "We shall have to go up the ladder one by one. I shall go first, then Yonker Galama, then Yonker van Hagendorp," and he proceeded to arrange the order. "On the wall we shall have to lie within a stone's throw of the guard-house, until the count comes. Should we be discovered or betrayed, however, we must keep together, and either force our way through the gate, or back over the wall. At any rate, do nothing until you hear my command. And now, silence."

No one passing the spot would have been aware of the presence of any living being, such a death-like silence did there reign. At last, the voice of Jonathan was heard again. He had approached without even their knowledge, sharply though they had listened.

"The way is clear. The ladder is hanging and there is but half a foot of water in the moat. Block says that the guard is almost entirely drunk."

In a moment the men had softly risen and advanced, sword in hand, led by Jonathan, Treslong, and Galama. Sombre and ominous did the walls of Brussels rise before them. The city, which is shaped somewhat in the form of a pear, was surrounded by a wall of about ten to fifteen feet, and a moat or ditch of about twice that dimension in width. It received its water from the river Senne, which flows through the city, and when in a state of siege it is filled, and has a depth of at least six feet. At that time, however, the water in the river being low, and no danger of an attack upon the city being apprehended, the moat was allowed to remain comparatively dry, and had at some places no more than half a foot of water. One by one, the men glided into the moat, and a row of dark shadows formed as it were a bridge to the wall, which rose straight up out of the mud. Treslong seized the ladder, and gave it a pull. It remained fixed. "When I am above, I shall give a jerk," he said, turning round. Then seizing his sword between his teeth, he began to ascend.

In a few moments Yonker Galama felt a jerk, and he likewise ascended. He soon reached the top, and was helped upon the rampart by Treslong, who lay on his stomach.

"Where is Block?" he whispered to Treslong, who was bending down to help up another man.

"Here I am; who asks?" said Block's voice.

"It is I, Galama."

"Galama! Yonker, you here? Who is at the Broodhuys?"

"Hans."

Block pronounced a curse. It was short, but passionate, as if the speaker had been taken entirely by surprise.

"What's the matter, Gerard?" asked Treslong, helping up another man, who, like his predecessors, sat on the grass.

"Nothing," replied Block; "only I thought the Yonker would have done far better at the Broodhuys. But no matter, it cannot be helped now, and so, silence." And another man appeared above the wall. It was not long ere all were up, and seated upon the grass.

"Follow me, and tread softly," whispered Block.

Every one rose, and proceeded in silence. They were as yet on the top of the wall. Behind the wall was a road, from four to five feet lower than the wall itself, and running right round it on the inside, constructed so as to enable the garrison to open fire upon the enemy without being itself exposed. This road is commonly called a curtained or covered way, while the wall, upon which as yet the confederates were treading, is called a rampart.

"We must get down on to the covered way," whispered Block. "Walk in single file."

They walked on silently, and were soon upon the covered way. Suddenly a shot flashed upon them, and a bullet whistled through the air.

"We are discovered," said Block, half audibly, halting and turning to Treslong and Galama, who were foremost. "Let us flee to the gates, and force our way through."

"Stop!" commanded Treslong. "That shot was fired intentionally, though too soon. We are discovered, there is no doubt of that, and you—"

A cry of men in front of them made them start.

"To the gate!" shouted Block, leading the way; but four more shots flashed, and he fell down with a yell. It was answered by the soldiers on the wall, who came rushing on in a body, and shouted.

Treslong did not lose his presence of mind. He turned round to the men who stood behind him.

"Back! up the rampart, and jump into the moat. *Sauve qui peut!*"

"Block! let us rescue Block," cried Karel; but no one heard him, and he found himself carried away with the rest.

In a moment the whole band fled up the ramparts, followed by the soldiers. Most of them made the dangerous leap without hesitation, and arrived safely in the mud. Two who hesitated were brained by the soldiers on the spot. To plunge through the mud, and flee into the forest, was the work of a moment. Balls whistled past them. The gate opened,

and some fifty men set after them in full pursuit ; but as they were scattered in every direction, not one was caught.

After a good quarter of an hour's run, Treslong and Galama, who had kept together, halted in a part of the wood far away from the Rookery. They lay down amongst the bushes, and waited. It was then that they realized the full consequences of what had happened. The count was hopelessly lost, even if he had managed to make his escape from the Broodhuys. To pass the aroused guard was now out of the question.

"Who can have betrayed us?" said Treslong. "I am very much afraid that it is your new acquaintance, Block. If he had not fallen himself, I should be certain of

it. I wonder how many of us have been killed."

"I do not suspect Block," said Galama. "He is the truest of us all, I think. You must acknowledge that it was a bold game, and that it is a marvel we were not all killed."

"Ay," said Treslong, gloomily, "this Brussels has been no good to me. I shall leave it to-morrow. Let us go to Ixelles, and leave the two counts to their fate ; and may God have mercy upon them."

They rose and went towards Ixelles, where Treslong's horse was stabled. And as they turned their back upon the city, Galama threw a last look towards it, and said in a voice almost choked with tears, "Farewell, headless counts!"

CHAPTER X.

CAUGHT!

IN the same room of the Broodhuys, where we have already witnessed the scene between Galama and Agnes, the latter sat alone, pale, sad, and thoughtful. A beautifully ornamented lamp shed its light through the room, and in the breast of Agnes, as in the room, there seemed to be a combination of sentiments as opposite and as conflicting as light and darkness. A deep sigh escaped her breast at intervals; sometimes her lips moved as if in prayer, while her clear and liquid eyes turned towards heaven with a beseeching look. The spinning-wheel before her, which often enlivened the silence of the room with its cheerful hum, was mute, and, for all the work it did, the little machine, with its beautiful carvings and ornaments of ivory and gold, might have been made to please the eye alone.

While thus she sat, the door which led to the kitchen was softly opened. Agnes started, and turning round her head with a quick movement, threw an anxious and somewhat bewildered glance at the door. But her look softened, and her face assumed an expression of kindness, when she saw the eyes of her maid regarding her with a mingled look of pity and beseeching.

"What is it, Gritta?" she asked, in a kind voice.

Gritta, thus encouraged, came in; running up to her mistress, she knelt down beside her, and seized her hand. It was icy cold.

"Ah, mistress," said the sympathizing girl, covering the thin fingers with kisses, and endeavoring to warm them between hers, "it is not right of you to be thus sitting and musing alone. You look so pale and weary. The color which I so much loved to see in your cheeks is entirely gone, and I have hardly seen you smile this last year and more. It grieves me to see you suffer so; for though

you never complain, Mistress Maria, who has been far worse, as the doctor says, looks ever so much better than you do."

"Gritta," said Agnes, looking kindly at the girl, "the illness from which I am suffering cannot be cured by a doctor. But do I then really look so alarmingly ill? This light perhaps makes me look paler than I am."

"No," said Gritta, decidedly, shaking her head; "I have watched your face in the daytime, and I have seen it paler than it is now. And you are trembling all over. I am sure you must be ill, and it's all from reading these books. Father Florisz always tells me that I must throw them into the fire whenever I see them, for that I am sure to get an evil spirit within me if I read any of them. Oh, mistress, it may be the evil spirit that is shaking you now, for all you know. Let me go and fetch father Florisz. He will cast it out."

Agnes leaned her head upon her hand, and endeavored to control her emotions with one powerful effort. She was thinking how best to get the girl to help her in executing the plan without making her acquainted with it.

After Karel had left her, she had remained within that dark room for some hours, battling with her feelings, and trying to look calmly at what she had to do. For though Agnes was morally courageous, and could not bear the idea of cowardice, yet, after all, she was but a weak girl, and for the execution of great deeds she was almost as badly fitted as Maria. The next morning, however, she was in a much more favorable mood, and to her own surprise acted the invalid so well, both before her father and Father Florisz, that the one was very near renouncing his favorite saint for allowing his daughter to become ill, while the latter proposed to return at some more appropriate time, which Agnes fixed for that night.

And then she made the second move. She told her father that it was no use speaking with Father Florisz down below, where their words were interrupted by the sounds of the soldiers; and that, were they to go to the little room on the top floor, their interview might be attended with far better results.

Vlossert listened to her request for a pass with astonishment; for the little room was but seldom used, and never within his recollection had it been used by her. And it is possible that at any other time he would have refused her request; but he was partially possessed with the spirit of wine, and eager to join the party of officers who were engaged in playing at dice. Moreover, the quarrel with his daughter was fresh in his recollection, and as he looked at her, standing there with downcast eyes, and revealing an emotion which he ascribed to every cause but the true one, his heart softened towards her. He gave her a loving kiss, blessed her as a pious and obedient daughter, snatched up a pen, and scribbled the order. Then, as if the whole load was taken off his mind, he gave her another kiss, and left the room whistling a tune and jingling his money in his pocket.

Agnes remained behind, vainly striving to calm herself for the coming event. She had told her father that she sought to go up to the little room in order to be free from the noise of the soldiers who occupied the ground-floor and the first and second floors, and whose rude laughter was but a sorry accompaniment to a pater-noster; but now that she began to think about the details of the matter, she felt that difficulties beset her path at every step. With her father's look bent upon her, she had felt herself tremble, and how would she be able to pass between and listen to the rude criticisms of unknown soldiers! And with Karel by her side, whose haughty temper she well knew, and by whom she feared the insults of the soldiers would not be taken in so meek a spirit as a holy father was supposed to possess, she almost despaired of ever reaching the little closet. She earnestly hoped that some other confederate would be chosen; for she owned to herself

that with him at her side, her courage might forsake her.

But how was he to get inside the house with the sentry at the door, and nothing arranged? Suddenly, when Gritta offered to go and fetch Father Florisz, a thought struck her.

"No, Gritta," she said, soothingly; "Father Florisz promised to come to-night, and ought to be here by this time. Watch at the door for him; and when he comes, let him go to my cousin Maria. I have asked another holy father to come to me. When ~~he~~ arrives let him come in here, and do not let Father Florisz see him. You had better watch at the door for him too. Now leave me, and let me know when Father Florisz is here."

Gritta threw an earnest look of pity at her young mistress, and left the room. The large clock of the neighboring church of St. Nicholas struck the hour of ten, and the tones trembled long and solemnly over the silent city. They seemed to be answered by sounds of another, though not less solemn kind; for blows, as if carpenters were at work in the neighborhood, fell upon Agnes's ear. She started, and put her hand before her eyes, for she understood but too well what those sounds meant. They were those of the men who were erecting the scaffold on the square, the spot where, within twelve hours, the bloody deed was to be done.

"If he does not come speedily, we shall be too late," said Agnes, stepping towards the window, and pulling aside the curtain. "The Bishop of Ypres is to be here at eleven, and it is ten now. Where is Karel?"

She turned her head. Through the kitchen door, which was partly open, she could see all that happened in the kitchen and at the back-door. A man dressed as a priest, was speaking to the sentry, and to Gritta. For a moment he turned his head slightly, and then followed Gritta into the opposite room, where Maria was. Agnes had recognized him as Father Florisz. A crowd of thoughts came upon her at this moment. Was it right of her to leave her weak, her faltering cousin in the hands of a priest? The conversation of the previous evening recurred to her, and

thought how the undecided and gentle of Maria was still hesitating between religion in which she had been born and, and the one, all the arguments and sonings in support of which even clearer words than hers had at times been unable to comprehend. Should she be the cause of her cousin's falling off? Was it not her duty to save everything, and guard her against that? She made a move towards the door, and pressed her hand on her beating heart. Suddenly a voice behind her said softly:

"*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.*" She looked round. A pair of black eyes stared at her from under a monk's cowl, but whether the person himself was outside the window or within the room she could not see, her alarm at the moment prevented her from coming closer. She recovered herself, however, when the same voice said:

"Can I enter, my daughter, or is there any danger?"

"Enter," said Agnes, in an agitated voice; but for God's sake take care!" and she ran towards the kitchen door, and locked it.

"Take care!" said Hans, jumping into the room, and closing the window; "care and wine are the only two things that I sometimes have too much of. But how, Mistress Agnes, you stand before me trembling as a leaf! Do you not remember your faithful servant, Black Hans?" and he threw back his cowl.

"Hans!" said Agnes, striving to appear as calm as possible; "O God be praised that is not Karel! How are you, my faithful friend, Hans?" and she gave him her hand.

Hans respectfully took the little hand, and looking round the room, cautiously pressed a soft kiss upon it.

"Eh!" he said, holding it in his own big brown hand, "how it trembles! I think I was quite right in keeping the Yonker from coming here. Lovers, Mistress Agnes, are excellent in their way, as I found out just now; for I am sure I would not have known how to get in if that lout of a German had not been so sweet upon Gritta. I stood here for about a quarter of an hour, and I could not get a chance. Lovers, I say, are excel-

lent in their way; but when they come to face danger, side by side, they are no good."

His words, unmeaning though they were, effected their purpose. He stood there, so cool, so unconcerned, as if he had all his life been a monk, and as if he were at this moment engaged as such, without a shadow of danger around him. Agnes looked at him, and unconsciously his manner calmed her.

"Do you not think that I look very much like a pious and reverend father?" he continued. "I have been told before that I would do very well for a bishop. But let me beg you to sit down for a moment, and tell me distinctly how we are to go."

He led Agnes to a chair, and stood before her.

"We have but little time left," she said, much more calmly than before. "In less than an hour the bishop will be here, and then our plan will be impracticable."

"An hour," said Hans, somewhat startled. "Block told me he was not to be here till twelve, and it is just past ten."

"He is coming at eleven," said Agnes. "I have a pass for the staircases up to the garret. We must first ascend the middle stair. Then turning to the right, we must pass through two rooms occupied by the Guild of Trumpeters. Then there is another stair up to the second floor, and so on to the closet."

"And have we to go through the kitchen?" said Hans, looking at the other door.

"No; we shall go by this door, as soon as you are ready."

"Lead on, madam. Now for the count: God help us!"

Agnes had risen. She was almost perfectly calm, and the easy manner of Hans inspired her with hopes of success which formerly she had not felt. She opened the door which led to the cross-passage, and listened. The uncouth sounds of soldiers' laughter, mixed with the noise of the preparations outside on the square, met her ear, and stimulated her to decisive and cool action. She advanced, and beckoned Hans to follow. With every step she took her courage grew, and she walked up the staircase which led to the first

and principal floor as firmly as if she had been the lady of the house, followed by a train of attendants.

The large vestibule of the Broodhuys, with its marble pavement, its magnificent statue of the Virgin, and its hangings of costly and beautiful tapestry, was guarded by some dozen soldiers, who were pacing up and down, or sitting on a form. Two halberdiers stood upon the first step of the stairs, like statues, scarcely moving a limb. A tall man, dressed as an officer, leaned against the balustrade.

To him Agnes applied, showing her pass and pointing to Hans. The officer threw a quick glance at the disguised Beggar, and turning round, ordered the soldiers to let them pass. Silently the soldiers moved aside, and the two ascended, their hearts beating with joyful expectations. There was a landing, however, in the middle, and here some five or six soldiers were grouped, neither so silent nor so tranquil as their lower brethren.

"Halloo," whispered one, as he stepped in the way, seemingly by mishap. "Who is this? A beautiful girl and a stout priest. Is this another prisoner, father?"

"Son," said the monk, in a sepulchral voice, "*Prædicare captivis remissionem veni.*"

The soldier stepped back, discomfited by the look of the holy man, and the terrible sound of his words, though he had not the least idea of their meaning. But another of his comrades who was at once bolder and less awe-struck by the appearance of the monk, stood on the stairs.

"You cannot pass here, madam," he said, "and I wonder how you could take such a black-looking cur for your companion. You might have found many a better one than him, to be sure." And he stroked his own beard with apparent satisfaction.

"Stand aside," said Agnes with a look and tone of command. "The officer of the guard below has let me pass, and thou shalt not detain us. I am the daughter of the warder."

The insolent soldier looked towards his officer, and observing his motion to let them pass on, he stepped aside with a scowl, and

allowed them to proceed. They soon arrived on the first floor, where two other sentries were on guard. There, however, no difficulty presented itself; the pass was shown and the couple allowed to proceed. It was almost dark on that floor. A small lamp united its feeble efforts with those of the larger ones on the upper and lower stories, and managed to throw just a dim light over the scene.

"Go on, Mistress Agnes," whispered Hans. "We are drawing nearer to our object. Keep step with the hammers if you can—time is precious."

At the same time a series of blows delivered by a hammer resounded over the square and through the house. A slight shudder crept over Agnes, for she knew they came from the scaffold.

"A light," she said, pausing. "I have forgotten to take a light with me."

"Move on," whispered Hans; "I have got one good enough when we get up there. Can't you find your way in the dark? if not we must go back."

"Oh, yes," said Agnes; "I was born in this house, and know every inch of it."

She walked on, and entered the little room before them, which they had to pass before they could reach the staircase that led to the next floor. Their steps sounded dismally on the wooden floor, and Agnes was glad when by the little light which shone through the door behind them, they reached the opposite door. She grasped the handle, when to her astonishment the door would not open.

"What!" said she; "this door shut locked! It cannot be; I have never known it to be so in my life! and the other one, too. Hans, did you shut it after you? Try this door, open the other one."

She spoke in short gasps, twisting and turning the handle all the while, and hurting her little fingers in the effort. It had become quite dark in the room, and though they had not heard it, they surmised that the other door must have been shut too. Agnes was silent, and Hans could hear her breathe heavily beside him.

"Be calm," he said, groping about, "and

we shall soon get out of this. Where is the handle? Ah! here it is—no," he said, after an attempt to open the door. "I'll try again."

He gave another pull at the door. The handle came off in his hand, but the door remained unmoved. He paused a moment, and retracing his steps, soon found the other door which they had entered, and which proved to be shut also. Softly grasping the

handle, he twisted it round, but with no other result.

"What!" said Hans, vainly applying all his strength; "it must have been shut from without! Is there no other outlet to this room?"

"None whatever," sounded the trembling voice of Agnes in the dark.

"Caught! by my Beggar's pouch!" cried Hans; and he stamped impatiently with his foot on the floor.

CHAPTER XI.

A LITTLE TIGER.

FOR some moments both stood without speaking, and listened involuntarily to the sounds without—the hammering, the tones of the mess-room, and the regular tread of the sentry. Agnes was bewildered. She thought of nothing, she stood like a lifeless image, and her breath came and went almost imperceptibly. Hans, on the contrary, was not long without becoming fully aware of the dangerous position in which they found themselves. He stood for a moment collecting his thoughts, and then, feeling in his pocket, he produced the implements for making light, which he had been cautious enough to take with him.

"Let us at any rate see what kind of prison we are in," he said; and, striking a light, he lit a little wax candle, and looked round the room.

It was a small room, or rather an antechamber. It was, in fact, part of the corridor, or passage; but for the convenience of the Guild of Trumpeters, which occupied the large apartment adjoining, it had been converted into a little room. Four naked walls, a door at each end, a few wooden seats, and a small wooden table in one corner, were all the room presented. No chimney, no window, not a mouse-hole, which Hans could discover to serve for an escape. There was not a room in the whole house which would have served better for a prison than this.

When Hans had finished the survey of the room, he allowed the light to fall upon the face of his companion. He started at the deathlike whiteness of her cheeks and lips, and putting down the light upon the little table, he led the trembling girl to a chair. All her courage, all her firmness, all her strength, seemed to have fled, when she discovered that their attempt was crowned with failure. She sank down on the seat, in a position of utter despondency. Hans re-

garded her silently for some moments, and an expression of pity came over his face.

"Poor girl!" he muttered; "we ought not to have begun the thing. We might have known that her courage would last only as long as it met with no resistance."

Agnes heard his words, and turning her eyes towards him, she said slowly, and with a faltering voice:

"I am not such as you see me through cowardice. Had I to do this over again, I would willingly do it a hundred times, so the Count Egmont and you were set free. But I tremble because—"

She paused, and Hans could see by the faint flicker of the candle that she struggled to keep back her tears.

"I tremble," she said, at last, "because of the consequence which my deed may have for others. I have deceived my father—"

"Deceived!" said Hans, with a sneer. "Can you deceive the arch-deceiver? Can you deceive Alva? and is not your father an instrument in Alva's hand? Did not Rahab the harlot deceive the men of Jericho? Why, I have deceived ever so many times myself, and I do not think anything of that innocent dodge."

And as if this were a sufficient example for her to imitate, Hans began pacing up and down the little room with complacency. There was something striking in his cool manner. He did not appear to realize his full position, or if he did, he looked as if he had been prepared for it all along. His only care now seemed to be to set the fears of Agnes at rest.

"You need not be afraid, Mistress Agnes," he said, after a moment's pause; "Count Egmont will not be worse off than before. They cannot do more than kill him, and that, I suppose, they will do soon enough. And

as to myself, why, I am used to this kind of thing. I have been in almost all the prisons in the Netherlands, but I never saw the one yet that could hold *me*. And this little bare-walled bit of a pigstye is worse than any I ever saw. And after all, if they do have me, I suppose that must come sooner or later; and I'd rather die for a good cause, than be caught in a plundering expedition, and be shot as a robber. But they will not do you any harm. I should like to see the man that would hurt a hair on so sweet a head. I will stand by you, Mistress Agnes, and when you want me, just give the word, and this dagger will do its work yet, though it should be for the last time."

And Hans undid part of his dress, and showed underneath a coat of mail and a girdle with a dangerous-looking dagger in it. But Agnes shook her head; and looking at him with an expression of humility and sweetness on her face, she said:

"No, Hans. You must not use violence on my part, or even on your own. I cannot bear to hear you speak of killing your fellow-creatures as if they were mere brutes. You must remember that they are men as well as you."

"They are rather troublesome at times, though," grumbled Hans.

"But the reason why I am afraid," continued Agnes, "is not because of any personal danger befalling me. I think that I can bear torture and death willingly for our holy cause; at least the spirit is willing, though the flesh is weak, and I may be brought to do or say things of which I would repent my whole life long. That is the reason of my fear, and may God give me strength to persevere to the end!"

She paused for a moment, and the flush which now covered her cheeks showed that her mind was fully alive to the perils before her. Hans looked at her with a puzzled air. He did not seem to understand what she meant; at least, he muttered within himself:

"What does she mean? She's willing to bear torture, and her flesh is weak, and she would repent of it her whole life long? I do not understand her."

And probably Agnes saw the puzzled look in his face; for she went on: "We—at least I—shall fall into the hands of the Inquisition; I have long had a presentiment of this, and I have heard and seen too much of its working not to know what it can and what it will do. And oh, what a dreadful thing it would be if, through dread of their punishments and tortures, I should deny my Saviour! What would Maria, what would many of those say, who are still hesitating between two opinions, and with whom one bad example will have more effect than ten good ones? O Jesus! give me strength to suffer for Thee, and to confess Thee boldly before Thine enemies, that I may not only profess to follow Thy cross, but be willing to take it upon me whenever Thy honor and glory demand it. For whosoever shall deny Thee before men, him wilt Thou also deny before Thy Father who is in heaven."

She had sunk upon her knees by the table, and buried her face in her hands. Hans, no longer puzzled, looked at her with admiration and sorrow in his countenance.

"Ah!" he sighed, shaking his head, and wiping away a tear, "she has other reasons for belonging to us and our cause than I have—and I do not know that they are not better—ay, a good deal better," he added, with a sort of groan, as he turned with a fierce movement towards the door, at which at that moment a noise was heard.

It was that door which communicated with the large room, and which they at first found locked. Hans heard voices outside, and the key in the act of being turned. With one jump he placed himself firmly before it, and cried out to Agnes, who was still absorbed, and had remained in her prayerful position.

"Mistress Agnes, they are coming! Do not let them find you in that position. Sit down, and be as calm as possible; we shall get off yet."

Agnes looked up, as if she did not know where she was. In a moment, however, she recovered herself, and sat down upon the settee. Her face was perfectly calm, and there was even a look of cheerfulness upon it as she whispered, "Let them come."

"Come in, sirs!" said Hans, waiting for an opportunity when the pressure upon the door was for a moment suspended. He had pulled the cap of the cowl over his head, and with his arms folded across his chest, and his head sunk down, he stood in the middle of the room in as venerable a position as the most pious of holy fathers could have assumed.

The door opened, and a flood of light entered the apartment.

"Here we shall find the wolf and the lamb together," said a voice, which both recognized as that of the officer who had allowed them to pass at the bottom of the stairs.

He entered by the side of a stranger, while some dozen soldiers followed on their steps, and stood inside the doorway. The stranger was a short man, of very slender make and somewhat decayed figure. At any rate, his round shoulders and bent back gave him the appearance of being older than he really was. To judge by his face, which was regular and by no means unpleasant to look at, he must have been between forty and fifty years of age. It was browned by the sun, and worn by hard work; the peaked beard and mustache, together with his whole dress, gave him the appearance of a Spaniard. He was addressed by the officer with that respect and deference which is bestowed upon one higher in rank.

On entering the room, he eyed first Hans and then Agnes, with a cool and scrutinizing glance. Then turning to the officer, said, in pure Dutch, a slight smile parting his thin lips,—

"And are these the two liberators of the Count Egmont?"

"They are, Sir Inquisitor. Soldiers, seize this man, and bind him!"

"Hold!" cried Hans, in a warning voice, and stretching forth his hand to the soldiers. "Touch not the anointed of the Lord!" and then turning to the officer, he said, drawing himself up,— "I would know, Sir Captain, by what authority you presume to lay violent hands upon one of our holy order, who has already been obstructed in performing his sacred office. Is our order become

so powerless, think you, that it is unable to make you an example of the punishment which it inflicts upon the profane and untoward children of the Church?"

The soldiers had fallen back on seeing Hans's movement, and even the officer seemed somewhat startled at the haughty tone of the man before him. The inquisitor touched him slightly on the hand, and stepping forward, he asked in a reverential tone,—

"What, holy father, is the cause of your complaint?"

"I know not whether thou art a son of our most holy Church, or whether thou art one of the Philistines," said Hans, who had not heard the name of the stranger; "but if thou hast one grain of the reverence which is due to my garb and to the sanctity of my calling—and to judge by the dress, I presume thou comest from that great country where heresy has not made such fearful strides as to cause men to forget that we are the key-bearers of heaven;—if thou hast the welfare of our mother Church at heart, command these sons of Belial to let us pass, and suffer me and my daughter to proceed on our errand."

"It is strange, father, that you and this maiden should have been detained, if your business was not of a suspicious kind. How came you within this chamber, at this hour of the night, and into this house?" said the stranger, in a tone as if his mind were swayed to and fro by doubts.

"The natural man understandeth not the things which are *Spiriti Dei*," said Hans, gravely, not observing the smile which his blunder called forth upon the lips of his interrogator. "I was being conducted by my pupil to our little cell at the top floor, where we intended to spend some hours in holy meditation and pious reverence, and had for that end obtained her father's permission, when, passing through this room, both doors were locked, behind and in front of us, and we were thus detained in this little closet. Pray, convince thyself that our errand was undertaken with the knowledge of the warder, our son;" and he handed him the piece of paper which he had taken from Agnes.

The stranger threw a quick glance at it, and turning toward Agnes, he said in a kindly interrogating voice,—

"And are you such a pious and zealous daughter of our holy Church, that you would forsake your night's rest to spend your hours in prayer?"

Agnes looked at the questioner with calm eyes, and said in a distinct voice, "I am not."

The inquisitor looked at her, and then at Hans.

"My daughter! my daughter! what means this?" said Hans, in a tone of admonition, while he made the most expressive signs with every movable part of his face, to induce Agnes to follow his example.

But Agnes seemed to have no such intention. She shook her head, and said, "I am a daughter neither of you nor of the Church. There is only one whom I call father, besides the warder of this house."

"Sir stranger," said Hans, quickly touching the inquisitor upon the arm, "I pray thee, do no longer detain us. Some damnable heresies have entered this young girl's head, and it was for the purpose of converting her from these pernicious doctrines that I intended to speak to her this evening. Suffer us to pass, and I will pledge my Beg—my soul, that she shall become as dutiful and pious a child of the Church as myself."

"Enough of this farce, Yonker Galama," said the stranger, turning himself sternly towards Hans, and looking him full in the face; "do no longer profane and desecrate the holy garb you wear. You and your intentions are too well known to us to need your explanation. Soldiers, pinion this pious father; but take care, lest he have some weapons about him as smooth and deceitful as he is himself. And let us gently lead this lamb away. We shall bring her to a place where she shall have plenty of opportunity to be converted, if such damnable heresies are really present in her."

Hans stood for a moment aghast, and a close observer would have noticed a change in his color. His first movement was for his dagger; but seeing that such would be of

little use, he folded his arms on his breast, and said:

"Take me. I am a man of peace, and not of strife. *Fiat voluntas tua.*"

The soldiers approached with their halberds pointed at Hans, as if he possessed as many hands and weapons as they. At the same time the captain informed Agnes that she was his prisoner. The two were surrounded by soldiers, and the troop was just putting itself in motion to quit the room, when a loud noise outside attracted their attention.

The voice of the warder, speaking hoarsely and excitedly, commanded the sentry on guard before the door by which our two prisoners had entered the apartment, to unlock the door, and let him enter. It seemed at first as if the sentry refused; but a moment afterwards the door flew open, and the warder, flushed with wine and greatly excited by something or other, staggered into the room. But when he beheld the group before him, his daughter, dressed in the gay colors of that period, with her hair streaming down her back, and the naked blades of the soldiers shining around her, the monk with his arms tied behind him, and above all, the little figure of the inquisitor, which he knew so well, he staggered and fell against the post of the door.

"What! stop, Sir Inquisitor!" he cried, in a bewildered voice. "It is true, then, that you are leading my Agnes away. Agnes! Agnes! has it come to this? O holy Mother of God!"

And in a burst of genuine grief he covered his eyes with his hands. He recovered himself in a moment, however, and turning to the inquisitor, who stood looking at him with an unmoved face, said, in a respectful, yet reproachful tone:

"There was a time when you would have rescued my daughter, instead of taking her to prison. Is your gratitude so short-lived?"

"There was such a time, Sir Warder," answered the inquisitor, "but that time is past."

Vlossert cowered before the cool eyes of the little man; but the sight of his daughter, who stood in the midst of the soldiers, with her head half turned away from her father

seemed to revive all his courage once more, for he said :

"Upon what charge is she being imprisoned, Sir Inquisitor? and can you show me the warrant from any of the governing authorities? for you know right well, that when I entered upon the post of warder of this house, I had to swear that no one within its walls should be suffered to be imprisoned without proper warrant; and that oath has never been cancelled, nor the condition either, so far as I know."

"Nor so far as I know," said the inquisitor, pulling a paper out of his bosom, and handing it to the warder. "But you will find by this that I have due orders to imprison Agnes Vlossert, and Yonker Karel Galama, for being concerned with others in a conspiracy against his excellency the duke, for the liberation of one of the prisoners in this house and under your care—Count Lamoral Egmont." And the little man fixed his eyes upon the unhappy warder, within whose trembling hand the paper rested.

"Galama!" he repeated mechanically; "Galama! Would he dare to come here for such a purpose?"

For the moment he seemed stupefied, and the look which he threw upon the assembled soldiers was bewildered. But suddenly he made a step towards them, his face lit up, and he cried out,—

"Why, there must be a mistake here, by our patron saint, the Lady of St. Gudule! Galama? This great fat monk is not my nephew. *He* is only twenty-two years old, and this—what, is it *Ha*—"

"Ay, my son," said Hans, interrupting him just in time, "dost thou see how thy confessor is being insulted by these soldiers? Tell them to what holy orders I belong, and cause me to be liberated at once."

It would have been difficult for the most skilled pencil correctly to draw the face of the warder when he heard these words. At first, when he discovered it was Hans, who, as he could easily guess, was but a substitute for Galama, his heart misgave him, for he saw

that the warrant was right. How Hans could be there in that capacity, and for that purpose, he could not understand. His words, however, gave, as Vlossert thought, a clue to the mystery. The look of abject misery left his face, and with ungovernable fury, shaking his fist at Hans, he said in a hoarse voice :

"Thrice cursed be thou and thy master! May the most fearful punishments be thy lot here and hereafter, thou arch-rebel, thou viper! Is it not enough that I had to feed and shelter thy master's cursed sister, but must he send thee to impose thyself upon my pious daughter, and thus lure her into that destruction which is thine by right?"

This last accusation appeared to touch Agnes to the quick. It seemed as if she could not bear the thought of having deceived her father; for at his words she cast at him a look of pain, and covered her face with her hands. Her father seemed to understand that motion; for with a faltering voice he asked :

"What, Agnes, has he not deceived thee? Has my daughter consented to conspire against her father with the king's enemies and his? Say that you thought he was Father Florisz; say that you had no evil intentions!"

While Agnes stood sobbing, with her face covered, not daring to look at her father, and he, in heart-broken tones, repeated his question, a murmur was heard on the stairs, and an agitated female voice said, "Where is she? Oh, let me see her! Agnes!"

The inquisitor frowned; but ere he could shut the door of the little room, Maria rushed in, her dishevelled hair streaming down her back, and her features deathly pale. For a moment, when she beheld the group, the warder with his face distorted in agony, the inquisitor, whom she knew well, and her beloved Agnes surrounded by the soldiers, she paused, and pressed her hand to her forehead. Then, with a sharp cry of "O Agnes, it has come at last!" she rushed into her cousin's arms, not heeding the soldiers, who were too surprised to resist her. And in the doorway stood the figure of another monk, who looked on the scene with a sarcastic smile.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FLESH IS WEAK.

THE inquisitor grew impatient. The whole scene had lasted but a few minutes ; but, accustomed as he was to do his work in secrecy and silence, even this time was too long for him. He was just going to give the order to remove the prisoners, when Maria, turning round, fixed her streaming eyes upon him, and said in a voice of supplication :

"O sir, do not let her go. She is not guilty ; she has done nothing. Send these away ;" and she pointed to the soldiers.

She did not notice Hans, who was standing behind her looking at the whole scene with the utmost *sang-froid*.

"Ay, Maria, my child," said the warder, grasping at a straw, "tell him that Agnes is a pious girl, and that she mistook this lying impostor for Father Florisz ; for indeed they are much of a size."

"Are they ?" said the voice of the monk in the doorway, who was no one else than Father Florisz himself. He was shorter, but quite as stout as Hans, and might have been taken for him, had he not spoken ; for his voice was high and full, that of Hans being low and almost growling. "Your haughty and learned daughter, Sir Warder, cannot excuse herself by saying that she mistook some one else for me ; for it was by her directions that I was admitted into her own room. And yet I hear she has trusted herself to another of my brethren ; and is it he whom I see there surrounded by soldiers ? What has—"

"Ay, Brother Florisz," said Hans, in a sanctimonious tone, "take note of my condition. *Benedictus qui venit*—"

"Silence !" said the inquisitor, sternly ; and turning to the officer, he continued in a low voice, "Command your men to separate the two girls, and let us march."

"One moment, Father Hubert," said the confessor, stepping forward. "Would you

separate the two girls ? I should advise having them taken away together, since they are both guilty of the same iniquity ;" and turning to Vlossert, he continued, "Know you not, Sir Warder, that your daughter is deeply stained with heresy, and that she has already greatly led astray the mind of her cousin ? Ask her whether she can deny having spoken profanely of the Holy Church and its sacred servants, of our blessed Virgin, and of all other matters ; and if she does, ask her how she can account for the presence of this damnable heretical book, which I found in her room this evening."

It was true. Though Vlossert had not yet informed him of his daughter's heresy, Florisz had for some time doubted the piety of both Agnes and of Maria, and had taken advantage of Maria's solitude to get at the truth. He was clever, but so was Agnes, and she had always taken good care to be at her cousin's side whenever the priest appeared, which, as may be surmised, had not been often of late. When he found Maria alone, therefore, he cautiously played his game, and by skilfully questioning her, very soon found out as much of the truth as sufficed for him.

Unhappily Agnes had left the little Bible, out of which they had been reading, upon the table before the window, not knowing that the room would soon be visited by one of its bitterest enemies. Maria had partially covered it with one of her kerchiefs, but at an unlucky moment the confessor caught a glance of it. He snatched it up, and looked with flaming eyes from the title-page to the girl who sat before him speechless with terror. At last his gaze fell upon Agnes's name on the first page, and he smiled.

"What means this, my daughter ?" he said, with a look which made the poor girl's heart beat faster.

She turned her eyes on the floor, and was silent. Indeed, what could she say?

"Know you not that this is a most heretical book, for the reading of which many a girl younger than you has been condemned to the flames? But," he continued, as Maria remained silent, "I see the name of Agnes Vlossert in this book. You must follow me to her. I cannot let this pass."

Maria rose mechanically, and followed the priest out of the room, her heart throbbing violently, and her limbs trembling with agitation. But in the passage another surprise awaited her. In answer to Father Florisz's question, the weeping and terrified Gritta told him that "Mistress Agnes and the warder were upstairs a-quarrelling with some of the soldiers." No sooner did Maria hear this than she set off to find Agnes, whose help she now so urgently required. The sentry who had been left on the stair dared not obstruct her passage, and thus she appeared, followed by Father Florisz, in the midst of that tragic scene. And long afterwards there was a feeling of repentance within Agnes's breast, that she had allowed her little lamb to stray within the clutches of that wolf.

It was an easily recognized book in those days, and as the priest held it up to those in the room the effect was immediate. The soldiers, who were Spaniards, and did not understand one word of her conversation, stood motionless, wondering what it all meant, and in that disciplined order for which they were in those days world-renowned. But when Agnes saw the book, her manner changed. Her frame, which had formerly bent with tenderness over her cousin, became erect and firm. Her face beamed with a smile, and as she bent her head down to Maria, who was hiding her face in her bosom, she whispered:

"Be firm now, Maria, be firm. Do not think of Father Florisz, do not look at that little inquisitor; but think that Jesus is here, who is far mightier. He will help us."

"We are done for now," muttered Hans, adapting himself calmly to the new position.

The warder glanced at the book, and became, if possible, a shade paler than before.

He grasped for support at the little table, and his breath came shortly and thickly. Accustomed though he had been during the whole of his life to bow to the priests, at this moment he felt something like an inclination to resist; and if such had been possible with him, he would assuredly have defended his almost adored daughter. The inquisitor seemed to observe this spirit within him; for he said in a tone of fearful meaning:

"So ho, we have two fair martyrs here, and besides that a Beggar! A good harvest;" and he looked hard at the warder.

"I cannot believe it, Father Hubert," gasped Vlossert. "Father Florisz must have made a mistake. They cannot be heretics, not my daughter, and least of all, Maria. There must be some mistake."

Father Florisz frowned, but Hubert motioned with his hand, and directing his cold and cruel look towards Vlossert, he said, "We'll see." Then addressing himself to Maria, he said, "Be calm, my daughter, and weep not. There is no danger. But tell your uncle the warder here that you have never read that heretical book yonder, and that you and your cousin Agnes have not spoken profanely of the Church."

He paused, and there was a silence in the room. Maria had been separated from her cousin, and stood alone at a little distance, her face covered with her hands, and tears trickling through her fingers. When the inquisitor, who had spoken with a hollow and awful tone, ceased speaking, a shiver ran through her, and she sobbed almost inaudibly, "I do, I do."

"She does, she does!" cried Vlossert, joyously. "Ah, blessed be the holy Virgin! I shall give sixteen pounds of wax candles—"

"One moment, Master Vlossert," said the inquisitor, a malignant smile playing around his lips; "your joy comes a little prematurely, and would be all the better for suppression." Then, turning to the trembling girl, he said, "My daughter, I am glad that you deny having given your mind and soul to these most pernicious heresies of Luther; and as a true daughter of the Church, I would have you

kiss the little crucifix which Father Florisz has on his girdle. He will at the same time absolve you from your sin, I am certain."

Father Florisz came nearer, and held out his crucifix. Maria sunk upon her knees, and seized the little ebony image.

"Maria! Maria!" sounded the voice of Agnes, "do not! You have rejected the truth before the servants of Antichrist. In the name of Jesus, consider. This will be looked upon as a sign that you are a Papist at heart. Do not, Maria, do not! O God!"

Maria had bent her head under the hearing of these words.

Every drop of blood had left her cheeks, and her hands trembled to such an extent that she could hardly hold the crucifix in them. For a moment it seemed as if Agnes's words would have the desired effect upon her. But, looking towards the inquisitor, who had his eyes fixed upon her with an expression of cruelty, she closed hers, and pressing the crucifix to her lips, she murmured "Holy Virgin," and fainted. The terrors of the Inquisition, embodied in the inquisitor before her, had so strong a hold upon the poor weak girl, as to vanquish the little faith she possessed.

"*In nomine Domini te absolvo*," muttered the priest, as he bent down to support the powerless girl.

"Thus does the Church absolve her children, after she has frightened them with her sword," said Agnes, with a touch of bitterness in her voice.

The inquisitor turned sharply upon her. "And you, my daughter," he said, "will you not kiss the cross, and show yourself a pious daughter of the only saving Church?"

"Never!" said Agnes, stepping back.

She spoke with a decision and energy that made the meaning unmistakable. The inquisitor seemed to have expected the answer; for turning to the warder, he said:

"You see, Sir Warder, that my charge was well-founded."

Vlossert was silent. When he heard Agnes's word, his whole face became distorted with agony and fear. He began to see that his daughter was lost to him, and some-

thing of the possibility of there being danger for himself, too, seemed to dawn upon him. With trembling hands and lips he turned to the inquisitor, who seemed to grow calmer as the other showed signs of fear.

"Pater Hubert! Old friend! this is but the raving of an excited girl, upon whose mind circumstances have worked their injurious effects. I beseech you, I pray you—"

"Father!" cried the voice of Agnes, half sad, half angry, "why will you misconstrue my words? I am not raving, I am not mad. I am as calm as I have ever been, and my mind is perfectly clear. I tell the inquisitor here that I am no longer a member of the Church of Rome, but a member of the Church of Christ. Let him take me away, if such be his behest, and may the Lord Jesus have pity upon my poor unfortunate cousin."

"Yes, Sir Warder," said the inquisitor, turning to Vlossert, and speaking to him in an undertone; "I have as yet abstained from threatening, but I can assure you that you are becoming suspected by the Inquisition. Your daughter and this girl have long been heretical; and think you we know not that you had a hand in the scheme to-night? For look you, Master Vlossert, whose handwriting is this?" and the wily Jesuit showed Vlossert the pass. "Take care, Master Vlossert, take care; you are watched. Let your daughter go, or by the holy Virgin you shall go too."

The warder had no answer. The blow had been struck, and he lay prostrate before the giant form of the Inquisition.

"Take her away," he murmured; "and may the holy Virgin protect her best servants, the holy brethren of Jesus."

The inquisitor smiled disdainfully. He turned round, and was about to give a command to the soldiers, when a noise was heard below. A carriage drove into the square, from the side of the palace, and a horseman was heard to gallop from the opposite side.

Every one was in expectation of what was to follow.

A servant came running up the stairs, and saluting the warder, said audibly,—

"The Lord Bishop of Ypres comes to see the prisoners."

Vlossert turned round to the inquisitor.

"Let Gritta look after this girl," he said in a low tone, pointing to Maria, and left the room without looking back upon his daughter.

At that moment another servant came up to the inquisitor.

"Your worship is wanted below in great haste. A horseman waits for you in the hall, and gives you this;" and he handed the inquisitor a small gold ring.

Pater Hubert looked at the ring, and frowned. For a moment he was absorbed in thought. Then turning round, he said to the officer :

"Take the two prisoners into the next room, and guard them well till further orders. You"—turning to the messenger—"fetch the servant Gritta here to attend to this girl who, I see, is awaking out of her stupor."

Agnes gave a last look at the form of Maria, who was supported by Father Florisz, and then followed the soldiers into the next room. Wrapping his short mantle around him, the inquisitor turned round, and moved towards the door.

At that moment the Bishop of Ypres, preceded by Vlossert and the captain of the guard, ascended the stairs, carrying his message of death to the unfortunate counts on the next floor.

CHAPTER XIII.

MASTER AND SERVANT.

ARRIVED at the vestibule, the inquisitor looked round, and perceived in the darkest part of it a tall figure covered with a felt hat, and entirely concealed by the folds of a large sash mantle, which hung from his shoulders to his feet. He seemed at once to know who the stranger was; for, after pondering a moment, he gave an almost imperceptible movement of the head, and descended the stairs leading to the lower apartments, on reaching which he entered the sitting-room already familiar to us, and threw himself into a chair. He was followed by the mantled stranger. Locking the door as soon as he entered the room, and having ascertained that the one opening into the kitchen was locked, as it had not been opened since Agnes shut the latter went to the window, fastened it securely, and drew the thick curtain before it. When turning round, he again faced the inquisitor, who had eyed these proceedings with indifference, and said:

"I shall not give my enemies the advantage of my own weapons."

At the same time he took off his felt hat, and his mantle dropping to the floor, disclosed our old acquaintance, Gerard Block, dressed as a common soldier, with his arm in a sling.

"Are you wounded?" asked the inquisitor with some concern, noticing the sling.

"Slightly," answered Block.

There was a pause of some moments.

"You have failed, I presume?" again asked the inquisitor.

"I have; but not altogether," answered the other.

"Are you sure that you are on the right track at last?"

"More than ever. I have said A this night on the best alphabet in the provinces," answered the spy.

"And how is it that you have failed?" asked Father Hubert.

"It was purely through the stupidity of one of the soldiers on the wall. The blockhead ought to be hung, drawn, and quartered for his carelessness," answered Block, with something of passion in his voice."

"You should not give way to your passion, Brother Sextus," said the inquisitor, calmly. "The frequency with which you mingle with the outcasts of society, and the fact that you have to conduct yourself as one of them, should have no effect upon your piety whatever. Take a seat, and relate to me briefly what has happened."

Brother Sextus, thus admonished, took a chair, and sat down, silently smarting under the inquisitor's dry tone of sarcasm and reproof.

"I hope you will pardon my anger," he began after a moment's pause; "but whenever the thought strikes me, that I might have brought you three of the most notorious Beggars—Treslong, Galama, and Verveen—and that they have escaped by the rashness of a common soldier, I think even you, father, will acknowledge that the idea is somewhat irksome."

"Thou shouldst forgive until seventy times seven," said the little man, with an earnest voice. "But is that arch-rebel Verveen in our neighborhood too?"

"He was," answered Block, *alias* Sextus; "but I shall be much astonished if he has not by this time set out for France, in company with the other two. Let me briefly relate what has happened. When I saw you an hour ago, I told you that the arrangements had been made just as I wished them, so that we might catch Galama without spilling a drop of blood, and the others either dead or alive. Some alteration seems to have been

made since I left ; for, to my great astonishment, the second man who mounted the ladder was Galama, and I had nearly betrayed myself in the momentary surprise. It all depended now upon the suddenness with which they were surrounded, whether we might still hope to catch them alive ; for they are a desperate lot, and I knew that if there were the smallest chance of success, they would fight against any odds."

He paused, and threw a longing glance at the can of wine which stood on the table. The inquisitor, however, bade him go on, and he continued :

"You know it had been arranged that fifty arquebusiers should be hid on the wall, and fifty should take up a position outside, to cut off their retreat. The moment they fired a shot I was to jump aside, the arquebusiers on the wall were to surround and capture them, and those who endeavored to escape by the way they came would be equally well received. Suddenly, as they were all upon the wall, and the gate was about to be opened to allow the second fifty to go round, one of the soldiers fired a shot. I immediately perceived that it was a blunder ; and wanting to make the best of it, I shouted out that we were betrayed, and must at once flee to the gate ; and I do believe the desperate fellows would have followed me, had not the first shot been followed by others, one of which struck my arm. It was a good thing that I wore a coat of mail, else I might have been much hurt ; as it is, my arm is bruised, and I was staggered by the force of the bullet. It flashed through my mind, that the only way to save myself was by falling down, and pretending to be mortally wounded, which I did. The Beggars immediately turned round and fled to the wall, where of course their retreat had not been cut off, and consequently they escaped almost unhurt. That young fool of a Galama cried out that they should stop and rescue me. Ha ! I wish they had. They would have found that rescue more than enough for them. But for that shot we might now be in possession of the key to the secret which puzzles us all, but—"

"But, in short, we have failed, Brother Sex-

tus," said the little man dryly, "and we have to get at the key yet. Have you any idea who that man upstairs is, and whether he knows anything worth troubling about ? I first thought it was Galama, but he speaks very much like a priest, and is too old for the Yonker. He is a broad-shouldered fellow with a black beard and a scar across his cheek."

"That's Galama's servant, Hans," answered Block, for thus we shall continue to call him. "He may know something, but it cannot be much. It is a good thing, though, that we have him here ; for he is the only one that distrusts me."

"Why should he be the only one that distrusts you ?" asked Father Hubert.

"Because it was he whom I first saw yesterday morning, as he was singing a Beggar's song."

"But why should not the master be as suspicious as the servant ?" asked the inquisitor.

"You forget that I saved his life," said Block.

"Last night. But before that time, why should either of them have suspected you ?"

"Because I introduced myself at an unpleasant moment, and with nothing to recommend me but a very short letter."

"What were its contents ?" asked the little man, fixing his cool and scrutinizing glance upon Block, who turned down his eyes and hesitated. At last he repeated the words of the letter, which we already know.

"I know the blunder you committed at the inn, Brother Sextus," said the little man, after a moment's pause, "and I am not astonished that both servant and master should suspect you ; for that Peter Blink would have omitted an *l* in writing your name is, to say the least of it, unlikely. But you ought to have told me so at once, instead of hiding it from me. Remember, henceforth, wherever you are the eye of our order is upon you, and then we can see what has been hid from the servant himself."

A shade of astonishment, shame, and mortification passed over Block's face when he heard that the inquisitor knew what he had done ; for he flattered himself that it was u

rn to any one but Galama, Hans, and self.

Why did you not seize Galama on the before he could get away?" asked the isitor, after a moment's pause.

He or his comrades would have killed me himself immediately, or they would have ued him ere the soldiers could have come y assistance."

Is this Galama as great a heretic as his sin, the daughter of the warder?"

He is nothing at present but a Beggar. seems to have dedicated himself to fame."

Qui non est mecum, contra me est, et qui congregat mecum spargit," said the in-sitor, devoutly; "why did you not seize when he was in this room?"

"I should not then have known the Rook-; which will serve us now as a trap to ch whoever comes near it."

"But you would have had Galama, who is rth the whole Rookery."

"I shall have him yet, Father Hubert, and etter than ever."

"You seem to be very sanguine after your feat," said the inquisitor, a little angry at ock's ardor; "what are your plans?"

"Yonker Galama will not leave Brabant til he has tried everything in his power to scue Hans; for without him he feels him-elf as a ship without a rudder. The little at I have seen of these two has shown me at the Yonker may be the better educated nd the cleverer of the two; but that without ans to temper him and instruct him with his xperience he would long ago have been in ur hands. Though unseen by them, I was witness of the interview between Galama nd his cousin Agnes, and I have seen enough o convince me that he will do anything for er sake. With two such baits we cannot fail o hook the fish."

He paused, and looked at the inquisitor, who had risen, and was pacing the room with one hand raised to his chin, and his eyes bent on the ground.

"Are you certain he has been engaged in this correspondence with the Prince of Orange?" he asked, without looking up.

"I am. Both because of what I heard

Peter Blink say, and what he said himself to Treslong at the inn where we separated. I found means to engage that fellow Hans, who was watching me, and as I took a good look at Treslong I heard Galama say, 'It was at the express desire of the prince that I went to Ghent;' so that he must have been in direct communication with him."

"And do you think that if you went to him now, supposing he is in the neighborhood, that he would believe you, if you told him you had been taken prisoner, but had escaped?"

"He would, I think. It was for that reason that I fell down when the shot struck me, and I am certain all the Beggars believe I am either killed or dangerously wounded," answered Block.

The inquisitor paced the room again in silence, during which Block followed the little man's movements with his eyes, as a dog follows those of his master. It was curious to notice how great a difference there was between Gerard Block and Brother Sextus; between the man who spoke haughtily to Hans and even to Galama, and the man who spoke obsequiously to the inquisitor; between the pretended member of the patriotic confederacy, and the enslaved member of the Order of Jesus. The inquisitor paused, and after some more inquiries he looked at Block, and said slowly:

"Very well! Find out Galama. I will give you three days. On the evening of the 7th, two carriages shall leave and travel on the road to Ghent, which leads through the forest. One of them shall contain Agnes and Maria, the other Hans. At that spot where the two oaks have grown together, near the Hell-mouth, you and the Beggars must await them, and attempt a rescue. A company of light horse shall follow at a little distance, and another from the opposite side shall bar their flight. At the moment they are vainly trying to open the carriages the horse will be upon them. Secure Galama, and the rest may escape for all I care, now that we know their haunt. If you cannot find him, you must be back here on the morning of the 7th. Go, and may the holy Virgin protect you. Your reward shall equal your services."

In a few moments the spy had left the room, wrapped in the folds of his cloak. The inquisitor looked at the door through which he had gone in a dreamy manner, and muttered to himself,—

“Once in our power, with his sister and his mistress before his eyes, his secret will be

ours in less than a week. And Agnes,” he continued, after a moment’s pause, “so young, so beautiful, so courageous, so pure, who would have believed that she could become a child of the evil one? We must try and save so precious a gem from everlasting destruction.”

CHAPTER XIV.

VIVENT LES GUEUX.

THE Watermael Road ran from Brussels through the outskirts of the large forest of *Boigné*, and taking a turn to the north, crossed a branch of the *Senne*, and joined the high-road to Ghent. It was in those days a lonely, dirty, ill-kept, and melancholy road to travel along, and was only used by persons who had to visit the villages of *Berchem*, *Uccle*, and *Vlier*, to which it was the only access, though even very seldom by those. Part of it ran through the forest, the shades of which often rendered it as dim as twilight. Part ran over heath and marl, where, in wet season, it was converted into lakes of mud. Other parts were covered with low underwood, at no place higher than four feet; but woe to the ignorant travellers who knew nothing of the treacherous nature of this portion of the road! It often happened that the inexperienced hunter or the unwary voyager, seduced by a starting hare, or some other attraction, hazarded himself within the bushes which spread their delightful and fresh green before his eyes. A marsh, as deep and treacherous as marsh can be, lay concealed below these bushes. There were indeed paths along which it was comparatively safe to go; but one step into the unknown region beside them, and the slimy and merciless slough engulfed the victim forever in its depths.

The peculiar nature of this part of the road was not known to every one. With the superstition of those days, people kept away from the spot with perfect horror, convinced, as they said, that an evil spirit, perhaps the devil himself, had taken up his abode there. Indeed, many firmly believed that it was the veritable entrance to the lower regions; and as little blue lights were often seen flickering above these spots, their opinion, founded as it was upon so-called true and proved facts, was generally accepted as the correct one.

The "Hell-mouth" was dreaded by nine people out of ten, though its exact position not one would have been able to point out. The tenth, who was perhaps better informed, kept his counsel, and took good care not to be a heretic in regard to so popular and universal a belief.

It was not far from the spot where the tall trees of the forest ended and the low underwood began, that there stood two oaks, one on each side of the way, which, after perhaps half a century of independent growth, had resolved to share life together. They stretched their lofty arms across the road, and embraced each other, never to part again. The sort of arch thus formed across the road was looked upon by the already mentioned nine people as the entrance to the dark region beyond, and consequently it was shunned and evaded with an equal amount of pious and reasonable abhorrence.

Against one of these oaks, in such a manner that they could not be seen from the road, two men were leaning, both of whom were dressed in the corselet, trunk hose, and felt hat which usually made up the costume of the wild Beggars. In their belts were a brace of pistols and a sword, while the younger one had, moreover, a large knife at his side.

"I cannot comprehend why they should come this way," said Galama, for it was he who was the younger of the two. He looked considerably pale, and his face showed that he had suffered a great deal of anxiety. He leaned against the tree, and his arms were folded across his chest.

"I can assure you, Yonker," said his companion, who was no other than our acquaintance Block, "that I heard them name this road. I was in the next room, close to the door, which was not shut, and guarded by a

soldier ; and pretending to be asleep, I heard the voice of the little inquisitor say that, as the army of the duke was to move for Friesland on that and the following day, they could not take the main road to Ghent, as it was blocked up with the cavalry regiments, the cannon, and military train. And this, you know, is almost as short and good a road as the main road."

"How on earth did you get clear?" said Galama, eying Block with pleasure. "It was a clever thing to get away when locked up and guarded by a soldier, in the heart of Brussels, and surrounded by inquisitors."

"They had forgotten to search my pockets. I had a knife in one of them. The soldier, thinking that I slept, stood with his back turned. I cut the rope by which I was tied, and got up. One blow on the temple did for him. He fell like an ox, and never moved. This is his corselet and his hose ; his helmet I have thrown away. I managed to clear the stairs and gain the house-kitchen, where I saw the servant sitting. I told her if she loved her mistress, to give her a scrap of paper which I wrote in the room, and in which I told Hans to shout if he could see us. I jumped out of the back window, and the sentry on guard saw me ; for, not very long after, half the town were at my heels, and it is a marvel to me still how I got off. But I do not rue my adventure. Though the poor counts, I suppose, are dead by this time, we have at any rate protested against the bloody massacre ; and if one head was as good as another, the two soldiers killed would weigh against them. But alas ! Egmont was worth a whole army of these foreigners."

"My brave friend," said Galama, evidently moved by his companion's words, "had I not been robbed of my paternal property, I would give you a better token of my friendship and gratitude. Accept this gold chain as a remembrance, and whenever you chance to be in the neighborhood of Brill, go to the widow of Baron Galama, and for her son's sake she will receive you as she would himself."

And unfastening a magnificent gold chain

with a Beggar's gold medal attached to it, he hung it round Block's neck.

"And whither, shall you go when this exploit is over, Yonker?" said Block, after a moment's silence, during which he had given Galama his own medal in exchange ; "for I should think it is getting dangerous here."

"I do not know but I may be killed in this affray," said Galama ; "but if God and the holy Virgin spare me, I shall resume my former trade. It is not very lucrative," he added with a smile, "but it is honorable and useful, and hardly any one else will take it, which is only another inducement for me."

"I should think our trade is very lucrative," said Block ; "especially when we find a rich parsonage or church to plunder. But dangerous it is, I confess."

"I do not plunder," said Galama, frowning slightly. "The letters I carry— But here are all our men returned from their expedition."

Both looked from behind the tree, and from all points armed men issued from the bush, and approached the spot.

"They are coming, sure enough, Yonker," said the bass voice of the Beggar whom we saw in the Rookery with a Bishop's mantle around him ; "now for a good blow at the cavalry for Hans, and a little innocent plunder for myself."

There were some eighteen men assembled on the spot, all dressed like Galama and Block. Galama stepped between them.

"In among and behind the trees is our post," he said. "Block and I shall each stand behind one oak, and fire the first pistol. But remain in ambush until you hear me shout, for after all it may be a ruse. Remember, first kill the horses, and then the men, if necessary ; but no cold-blooded murdering. Whatever the result of this adventure may be, after this we separate for good. I do not suppose any of you discovered an ambush?"

The answers were unanimously negative, though one or two reported that they thought the escort was very large.

"Well," said Block, "so much the more glory for us. Here they come."

The rattling of wheels in the distance was

heard, and in a moment not a single Beggar was to be seen on the road. The noise of the wheels became louder. At length, at the bend of the road there appeared, moving at a jog-trot, four horses and a carriage, with four dragoons at the side, a second one followed with an equal number of horses and dragoons, two dragoons bringing up the rear. There was a driver seated on each pair of horses, and by dint of whipping and spurring, the carriage slowly approached the two oaks. The first carriage was half-way through, when a roar from Hans was heard. Two well-aimed shots brought the two foremost horses to the ground. A tremendous cheer followed, and in a moment all was a Babel of confusion. The sharp ring of the pistols, the clatter of swords, the shouts, the cries and groans of the wounded, the smoke and the dust, were for a moment all that could be distinguished.

Suddenly, another loud cheer arose, and Hans appeared hanging half-way out of the door of one of the carriages, and cheering the Beggars on. The dragoons turned tail, and fled. Of the ten, only four were enabled to escape on horseback, three ran away on foot, and the rest lay dead or wounded on the road. The Beggars had strictly obeyed the command, and aimed at the horses first. Almost all of them lay dead, shot or stabbed; but the men had also been aimed at, and that with equally fatal precision. A scene of plunder now followed. Regardless of what might happen, the Beggars threw themselves upon the bodies of the fallen, two or three of which belonged to themselves, and began rifling their pockets, and cutting away what they could not unfasten, so as to get at their booty.

In the meantime Galama had flown to the foremost carriage, in which he descried the form of Agnes. She had risen from her seat, and while the fighting was going on around her, she had sunk on her knees at the bottom of the carriage, partly to guard herself against the bullets, partly to offer up a devout prayer for the success of the attack.

"Agnes, Agnes! look up! It is I, Karel!" cried her lover in eager tones, looking through the opening in the door, for window it could not be called.

Agnes looked up, and seeing Galama's face in reality, she started to her feet.

"Open the carriage, Karel!" she cried, joyously, and she pressed against the inside.

Here, however, they found unexpected resistance. Any one who has been in museums of antiquities must be acquainted with the form of those clumsy wooden boxes, which formed the predecessors of our neat brougham, or swift phaeton. It was a four-sided affair, wider at the top than at the bottom. At the front and two sides there were openings about a foot and a half square, too small to let anything but the head pass through. They were constructed of very thick wood, and the doors on each side were fastened in the same manner as the doors of railway carriages at the present time, a contrivance which, even in those days, was found a tolerably awkward manner of confining a passenger.

Galama pulled and pushed, and called for the help of others, and the door was hammered, kicked, and hacked with swords; but it was of no avail. It remained shut. The lips of Block, who was pretending to work as hard as any, were parted with a faint smile. Meanwhile our friend Hans was in the same dilemma. He pushed against the door; but as no one seemed to look after him, he meant to help himself, and found it answer quite as well.

"Here, Van Hagendorp," he roared to the Beggar close by, "cut this confounded rope by which my hands are tied."

The rope was cut. Hans laid hold of the door, but it remained firm, and another shake had no better result.

"What!" he cried, "shall I be caught in this little thing, after helping myself so far as this?"

He stood on the seat, and pressed his back against the top of the carriage. He had attacked the weakest part of the fortress. It flew off, and in two leaps he was by the side of the carriage where Agnes was confined.

"There is cavalry coming," he roared out, "so make haste, for God's sake! Who has a loaded pistol?"

Three or four were offered him. Placing the muzzle of one against the resisting lock, he cried:

"Take care, Mistress Agnes," and fired. "Hans is the boy for a bad lock," he said triumphantly, as the bullet, weighing nearly two ounces, smashed the lock.

Galama at once tore open the door; but he started back, for a large splinter had flown up and hit Agnes's fair white neck. A stream of blood immediately began to flow, and colored her dress. She uttered a slight shriek, and fell fainting into the arms of her lover.

The consternation of those around, when they saw Agnes lying on the ground, with her beautiful head resting on her lover's knee, while he, with frantic efforts tore up his linen collar, and endeavored to stop the blood, was almost tragic to witness.

"Do not be alarmed," said the calm voice of Block, as he pushed two men aside. "I have studied medicine, and will cure this in no time. Allow her head to rest on my knee." And very leisurely and slowly he proceeded to place the girl's head upon his knee, and tear a bit from a kerchief of his own.

"Agnes, Agnes!" cried Galama, seizing the girl's hand, and covering it with kisses, "speak to me."

"Yonker," said Hans, seizing him by the shoulder; "the dragoons are coming. Let us flee, else we shall all be cut to pieces."

"Yes," cried the Beggars, "let us flee; some of us will carry this young lady."

"Flee!" exclaimed Galama, scowling at them. "I shall remain here. This lady cannot be removed—she is dying."

At that moment, as if to contradict his statement, Agnes opened her eyes. "Flee!" she whispered, and she fell back into unconsciousness.

"Do not be alarmed! There is *no* fear of cavalry," said Block, speaking decidedly and slowly, and proceeding to dress the wound at his utmost leisure. He had listened with intense application, and his face became every moment more anxious. At last, a gleam of pleasure crossed it, and he said leisurely, "We are some ten miles from town here; and before the fugitives can bring help, we shall be far away. This maiden is dangerously ill."

"You lie, you black-haired cur!" cried Hans. "Do you think they would move me from Brussels to Ghent with no greater guard than ten men? Come, Yonker, for God's sake; I have seen a hundred of them, and why they are not here yet I do not know. Come! you yourself are wounded and bleeding. Flee! I hear them coming. I will carry Mistress Agnes." And the faithful fellow made a move as if to take her up.

Galama hesitated, but Block held up his arm.

"Do not touch my patient," he said, "unless you want to kill her."

"Leave us to our fate," cried Galama, jumping up and drawing his sword.

But he staggered and fell on the ground, and the blood trickled from his knee and along his hose, and colored it blood-red. A bullet from one of the troopers had hit him, though in the excitement he had not perceived the wound.

"Ah," he said with bitterness; "flee, since you wish, but leave me here with Agnes."

At this moment a Beggar, who had strayed towards the bend of the road, came running back with all his might.

"The dragoons!" he shouted; "*sauve qui peut!*"

"At last," sighed Block, almost inaudibly, as a heavy noise was heard rapidly approaching.

But softly though he had breathed them, his words were caught by Hans.

"Ah!" he cried triumphantly; "'At last' is it? Here it is, then."

A tremendous blow with his fist sent the Jesuit insensible to the earth, Hans stooped and took Agnes in his arms, as if she had been a child. At that moment a troop of cavalry turned round the corner, and with a tremendous cheer as they discovered the party, they clapped their spurs into the horses' flanks. The Beggars turned on all sides; but the underwood which grew between the oak and pine trees resisted their violent and misdirected efforts. At once the voice of Hans was heard:

"Follow me into the 'Hell-mouth,' and take care of the Yonker! *Vivent les Gueux!*"

He turned before the cavalry, which came thundering on, and was followed by Van Hagendorp, who supported Karel. A few yards brought them to the marsh, just at the moment that another troop of horse came galloping on from the opposite side of the road. Hans fled into the bushes, and ran along the path which was so well known to him. It was hardly broad enough for one man, but running quite close to each other, and bending as low as the bushes, the Beggars followed Hans in his swift course, and heard the bullets whistle over their heads.

"They cannot follow us here, boys," chuckled Hans. "See how they jump. By the holy Virgin, that's the fellow that called me a black-looking cur, just disappearing. Serve him right."

The Beggars turned their faces, and beheld

a frightful scene. When the dragoons saw their enemies disappear in the low wood, they raised a triumphant shout, deeming them now caught beyond doubt. Few among them knew the dangerous character of the soil, and the warning of those few were unheeded. Almost at the same moment both parties dashed into the bushes. In another, shrieks, oaths, curses, cries for help, and broken prayers filled the air; every moment some head was seen to sink, some helmet or hand to disappear. Those who had stayed behind gazed with fearful agony and gnashing teeth at the inglorious death of their comrades. And their rage became greater still, when far away over the tops of the bushes a felt hat was raised on a sword, and a cry resounded through the evening air of:

"Vivent les Gueux! Vive Yonker Willem."

CHAPTER XV.

AT DEATH'S DOOR.

It was with difficulty that the wounded Yonker managed to limp behind Hans, and scarcely had they reached a place of comparative safety when he fell down exhausted, and was soon in a state of unconsciousness. The sudden exertion of their flight through the marsh, the effect of what he had experienced during the last few days, and, most of all, the melancholy end of the two counts, which he knew must now have come, had told sadly upon his health. The bullet which struck his knee, though at the moment it gave him no more than a sharp pang, now threatened to finish what other causes had begun.

For some time the fugitive Beggars were at a loss how to act, charged as they were with the care of a delicate girl and their wounded chief, and being in constant expectation of a renewed attack from the remaining dragoons. But here Hans, who was best acquainted with the marsh, shone out in his best qualities. Cheering up the men's spirits with jokes and pleasantry, he first of all made them conduct the two invalids to a spot which, being situated a little higher than the surrounding marsh, afforded at least a dry and perfectly unobserved place of shelter. With one accord the men here chose him as their temporary chief—a choice to which even Van Hagendorp gave his consent without hesitation. After the unsuccessful adventure upon the wall, Seigneur de Treslong and two or three others had resolved to take to their horses, and join Count Louis. In vain they had entreated and almost prayed Galama to come along with them. Resolved to do all he could for the rescue of Hans, by whose noble sacrifice he now acknowledged himself to be saved, their prayers had no effect upon his Frisian determination of character. They separated, and left him behind with most of the Beggars, who preferred their

roving and adventurous life to the somewhat duller routine and strict discipline of an army.

The first thing Hans did in his new capacity was to send half his men into the forest again. Two were to go to the Rookery, and see whether it was still safe to repair thither. The others had instructions to "pick up" what they could get—in other words, to get provisions of any kind, and find out at the same time how matters stood. In an hour's time the two men who were sent to the Rookery came back with the intelligence that the place was dangerous, the warning cry having been given. On the return of the others with provisions, consisting mainly of wild fowls and rabbits and a few loaves of bread, a council of war was held. Agnes had recovered her consciousness soon after she reached her present shelter, and though greatly shocked by the late events, she yet took active part in the debate. For some time there reigned a great diversity of opinions. That the Yonker must be removed to a place of safety, all admitted. That this place ought to be as far away from Brussels as possible, was equally clear. But where to go? and how?

Some mentioned Friesland, where he had many friends, others were in favor of France, until Agnes, in a momentary pause, said that if he could be removed thither, no place in the world would be better for him than Brill, where his mother lived, and where the municipal authorities of the town were more lax in their religious and political persecutions than in most towns of the Netherlands. Hereupon one Beggar, who had brought a bottle of beer, informed the assembly that he had fallen in with a friend of theirs, a certain Jan Skipper, who was engaged in cutting wood from the forest, to load his barge, which lay in the river Senne hard by. This man was a

secret friend of the Beggars, and had often done them great service. He plied with his barge between Holland and Brussels.

Immediately two men were sent out to find him and treat with him. It was not long before they came back with satisfactory intelligence. When the skipper heard that it was the well-known Yonker Galama who would be intrusted to his charge, he gladly offered to take him to Brill, and run all risk. In the dead of night, a litter having been constructed, Galama was conveyed through the forest to the banks of the Senne, and thence to the barge. A sort of secret cabin, made by piling wood all around and above it, was formed in the hold of the ship, and here Karel was laid upon as soft a bed as could be made. Hans procured for himself and for Agnes some peasants' clothes, and thus—she as the skipper's daughter and he as the skipper's mate—they set out on their perilous journey, after a cordial farewell from their courageous and faithful confederates.

It would be useless—nay, tedious—to relate the **particulars** of the journey to Brill. Suffice it to say, that after a few hair-breadth escapes and a tedious voyage through canals and rivers, the skipper arrived in the haven of Brill, where he was well known.

The town of Brill was a small, but strongly fortified place at the mouth of the Meuse, situated at about half a mile off its southern bank, and connected with it by a canal or haven. Through this the water of the river was admitted into two large canals running through the town at an angle of fifty degrees to each other. The larger of the two ran from the water-gate in a south-easterly direction, and in the form of a crescent, towards the south gate, close to which it discharged its water into the fosse which surrounded the city. Part of it was called "The Spuy," an old Dutch word, which means a sluice or water-gate, and part "The Quay." The other, which was only half its length, and bore the name of "Maerlandt," ran to about the middle of the town, where it made right angles with "Long Street," the principal street of the city. The Spuy, the Quay, and the Maerlandt were occupied by the resi-

dences and warehouses of the chief merchants of the little town, whose goods were stowed up in the garrets and upper floors of their dwellings.

It was a simple and homely way in which these ancient Dutchmen earned their money. You might see them sometimes in their doublets and hose, their blue stockings and low shoes, at their desks or in their warehouses, or refreshing themselves with a tankard of wine or ale in the family room. Or they might be standing on the quay, superintending the unloading of the goods which some newly arrived broad-bottomed barge had carried to their doors. For in those days of bad roads, and highwaymen, of robberies in which even the authorities sometimes had a hand, and of unfordable streams, over which no one had ever thought of throwing a bridge, it was both safer and quicker to have one's goods sent by a ship, which, gliding slowly and surely along the innumerable canals and rivers which even at that period intersected Holland, appeared in its own time in the haven and before the sluices of the town, whence it was pushed along until it had arrived in front of the merchant's house, where it deposited its freight, and departed as leisurely and comfortably as it had come.

Most of these houses had large gardens behind them, especially on the Maerlandt, which was considered the more aristocratic of the two canals. One of these houses was occupied by the Baroness Galama, the mother of Karel and Maria, and the widow of one of the earliest sufferers for Dutch independence. One look at the widow was sufficient to reveal the relation borne by her to Karel and Maria. There was the fair complexion, the light hair, the blue eyes, the noble forehead, with which we are already familiar. But the mouth, that index of character, was not like that of either. If it was not so decidedly set as Karel's, it certainly wanted that softness and those lines expressive of meekness and timidity which were apparent in Maria's face. If her brow was less frequently contracted, and if her tones were less imperious than those of her son, her commands were yet as

regularly and as dutifully obeyed as his. Hers was a face upon which it was pleasant to look, presenting to the observer many traces of interest. It possessed all the dignity, verging upon haughtiness, of one accustomed to command, but blended with it were shades of sorrow, of meekness, and of sweet compassion.

She had been the daughter of a wealthy merchant in Flushing; her education as such had been tolerably good, and a residence in Brussels, the centre of fashionable life, had completed it. There she met the poor but noble Baron Galama, who could proudly talk of the deeds of his ancestors of ages back, and was a descendant of those sturdy and unbending Frisian podestas, who, with their little castles and commonwealths, defied the proudest and mightiest of tyrants. He was, however, no lineal descendant of the reigning family of the Galamas—consequently his property was very small; no wonder, therefore, that he was not averse to a match with the rich merchant's daughter.

But their happiness did not last long. By a succession of disasters at sea, her father lost the greater part of his fortune, and died, leaving her and her sister not more than a fifth of what they had expected. Baron Galama, now that he could no longer hold his own amongst the other nobles, and by the side of his wealthier cousins, wisely determined to withdraw to some smaller place where he might still be an important personage. He went to his native land, Friesland. There, however, he soon became too important, and was seized, tried, and executed. His widow, who felt herself less at home among the Frisians, returned to Holland, and settled with her two children in Brill. From time to time she was here visited by her cousins, who were in the midst of the political turmoil of the day, and who, patting young Karel on the head as he proudly paraded about with their swords or helmets, promised to take him under their protection, and make a real patriot of him. The baroness had inherited from her father a strong love of liberty and of country; her husband's disposition had run in the same direction, so

that she now occupied her time in educating her two children, and especially Karel, in all the principles which she held as a pious and faithful Catholic, and as a free-born and freedom-loving Dutchwoman.

When he was old enough, Karel was sent to the University of Louvain, while Maria, at the urgent invitation of Agnes Vlossert, the daughter of her sister, was sent to Brussels. Six months later, Alva arrived at the Netherlands, and notwithstanding his mother's prayers and tears, Karel snatched up the sword; and she afterwards confessed that she was proud of her son. While at Louvain he had often visited Brussels to see Agnes and his sister, and he thus became fully interested in the political questions of the day.

His first act of rebellion was on the occasion of the departure of the Prince of Orange for Germany, previous to Alva's arrival. Galama, who was a fervent admirer of the Nassau family, charged himself with a letter from the young Count de Buren, the son of the prince—who was also studying at Louvain—to his father. This fact got known, and endeavors were made to intercept the letter; but, thanks to his own valor and sagacity, as well as to that of Hans, he reached the prince in Flushing. The prince immediately took a liking to him, and with that wonderful talent which he possessed of judging men's character and capacities, he saw that Karel was a man he could use.

Ever since that time Karel was as devoted a servant of the prince as could be found. He was happy; but not so his mother, his sister, and his cousin. They feared every moment that he might fall a victim to the tyrant, like his father and his uncle; for they knew that every escape which he made, every successful journey which he accomplished, only enhanced the danger of the next. Day by day Karel's mother prostrated herself before the image of the Virgin in her bedroom, imploring protection for the darling of her heart. Each time that some traveller or friend brought intelligence from Brussels, or from other parts of Holland, and spoke the bloody deeds of the Spaniards and the bold behavior of many of the patriots

and Beggars in the land, her eyes would be dimmed with tears, and she would creep away to her own closet, and weep, half for grief and half for joy. For the good woman, though a pious Catholic, was as decided a patriot; and when the deeds of the Beggars were related, she was proud that her son was amongst them, and upheld the honor of his country and his race. I am afraid that some of my readers would smile, were I to tell them how many pounds of wax-candles the paroness presented to the Madonna of her favorite church, for her son's safety; but certain it was that she often pinched herself in many little conveniences for the sake of these candles. Poor soul! her piety was none the less sincere, because it was worthy of a better object.

She was sitting in the large room on the first floor, which looked out upon the Maer-landt. The room looked as if it had been prepared for some visitor. It was for those times well furnished, and the snow-white

sheet on the large bed spoke of the cleanliness of the mistress of the house. She had received a visit from the skipper that morning, who had cautiously made known to her that her son was in Brill, and that he would towards evening come with his ship alongside the canal, when at the most convenient hour her son could be removed. Great caution it was necessary to observe; for the authorities, though lax, would certainly not allow such determined fellows as Hans and Galama to escape, if their presence were known. Evening came, and with it the ship. The skipper, for appearance' sake, began to unload some wood; but when it had grown totally dark, the sick and feverish Yonker was removed by him and his mate, our friend Hans, to a comfortable bed and a mother's care. And Agnes, who had nursed him and kept him alive during their confinement in the ship, found a place of shelter in Maria's neat little room, and a place of refuge in the loving heart of her affectionate and tender aunt.

CHAPTER XVI.

GREAT EVENTS IN A SICK-ROOM.

AND now the two women set themselves with a determination and patience such as only women can show, to watch the sick youth. When he was carried into the room, and laid upon the bed, his mother started. He had left her a blooming, strong, rosy-cheeked lad; she found him now pale, worn-out, unconscious, all but dying. Much as she was prepared for, she had not expected this; but she restrained her grief, and hiding her feelings, which well-nigh despaired of his ever recovering, she showed Agnes a hopeful if not a cheerful face. But as that little hypocrite was doing exactly the same thing, there is no wonder that between the two the truth ere long came out.

Their faint hope was not augmented by the doctor, or rather barber, for in those days the professions of barber, surgeon, and physician were all practised by the same individual. He, however, had his own reasons for pronouncing the case to be very bad, that he might gain all the more honor by his cure, and therefore we may as well state that dangerous though Karel's condition was, it was by no means hopeless. The damp marsh and his confinement in the hold of the ship, together with his loss of blood, had certainly not improved it, and probably a few more days of it would have proved fatal. As it was, however, it was nothing more than a flesh-wound, the principal danger consisting in the fact that the bullet was in it still.

What with lancing, and nipping, and bleeding, and inflammation, however, it seemed as if the experimentalist and Nature were working hand in hand to bring our hero to his last resting-place; for he relapsed into a state of total unconsciousness. Each time the doctor approached the bedside, and looked at the pale form as it lay upon the bed, he shook his head gravely, and to judge by the different

Latin names which he uttered with an air of importance, it seemed as if each time the disease had entered a new phase. And one day, some two weeks after Karel had been brought into the house, he informed the baroness, in a low voice, that she had better send for a priest, for that the young man's last hours had come.

It was then that the baroness began to feel all the danger and distress of her position. The doctor, who was an old man, a sort of sceptic, and moreover a secret friend of the patriotic party, had faithfully promised to let no man know that Karel Galama the outlaw was in the house, and had kept his word. But now that he advised, as was his custom, to have a priest sent for, the mother's mind became swayed to and fro by doubts and fears. Once or twice, it is true, she had had her confessor in the house, while her son was there; but she had kept him downstairs, and he had seen neither Agnes nor Karel. Now, however, her only son, and perhaps her only child—for having had no intelligence from Maria, it was almost certain that she had fallen into the hands of the inquisitor—was on the verge of death; and the question arose within her, whether she could allow him to die without receiving extreme unction, and thus be lost forever. On the other hand, the danger not only for her son, but also for herself and for Agnes, was but too apparent. She thought how the priest would rave at her having Karel Galama in the house, and that for a fortnight without his knowing it; and thus perplexed she sank down before the crucifix in her little bedroom in an agony of mind which we will not attempt to describe.

As Agnes witnessed this struggle, she too went into her little bedroom, and knelt down, but before the crucified One, not before the crucifix. A strong attachment had sprung

p between Agnes and the baroness. The more they began to know each other, the more they loved each other; and the latter could not but applaud Karel's choice, of which she had been made the confidante long ago. It was therefore with the greater earnestness that Agnes prayed that her aunt might not commit so foolish and dangerous a deed, and that the object of their fears might yet recover. Her prayer was heard. The next morning, as the baroness was still in great uncertainty, Karel opened his eyes, and asked for something to eat, thereby putting to flight all their cares, doubts, and fears. It appeared that what the doctor had looked upon as his last slumber was a healthy sleep, and that instead of going slowly backwards, as the medical man thought, he had imperceptibly advanced.

A happy time now began for the three, and the only cause they had for grief was the uncertainty of Maria's fate. Hans, like a faithful fellow, had volunteered to remain the skipper's mate for some time, and made many journeys to Brussels and back; but he could only get at the most scanty intelligence regarding her, as the Beggars had abandoned the Rookery, blown it up, and retired to Dirk's Castle. As Karel began rapidly to gain strength, and to grow interested in the things about him, the two women took their embroidery or their spinning-wheel up to his room, and enlivened him by talking and reading. It was to this time that he ever afterwards attributed the great change which took place within him; for in the conversations which ensued, religion was frequently the topic, and it was to be expected that Karel, who had read far more at the University than laymen were generally allowed to do, and who, young as he was, had already passed through many experiences, would ponder all that he knew, and all Agnes's arguments, as he lay upon his bed and could do nothing but muse and think. And at length, when he learned one evening what the women had resolved to keep secret from him, namely, that the baroness had very nearly sent for a priest, his mind became decided. This took place one beautiful evening in the latter part of July.

He lay asleep in bed, and his mother and Agnes had taken their work up to his room, where they had a view of the ramparts and, in the distance, the Meuse, upon which the rays of the sun were dancing merrily. As he was asleep, the two women conducted their conversation in an undertone.

"Yes, blessed be God," said the baroness, "you are right, Agnes; we have, as it were, received him back out of the jaws of death."

"I shall never forget that night," said Agnes, "that Thursday night, when we thought that all hope was lost. It was the most fearful moment of my life. How he lay just like a corpse! For myself, I had already given up every thought of seeing him again."

"So had I," said the baroness, "and my greatest pain was the uncertainty as to his dying within the arms of our only saving Church."

There was a pause, not because Agnes had nothing to say, but because, on account of the sleeping invalid, she did not know whether it was the right moment now to say it. Hitherto, as if led by some instinctive agreement, the two women had avoided entering upon any directly religious discussion. The baroness knew very well that Agnes had adopted the new religion; and she regretted this change in the girl's mind all the more, because she loved her so dearly. She could not but look upon her niece as a soul forever lost, and though her loving heart continually revolted against this distressing conclusion, she was too devoted a daughter of the Church not to submit her human feelings to its dogma. But, agree as she might with the priests in judging of the state of Agnes's soul, she did not agree with them in the means chosen to bring her back from the way of everlasting destruction. She abhorred persecution with all her heart. Of course, she could not but acquiesce in it, if carried on by the priests, but she could never be prevailed upon to practise it herself. She hoped to gain the lost sheep back by means of gentle persuasion and kind admonition, though knowing that Agnes was well instructed in the fundamental principles of the new religion, and that she was not easily con-

quered by argument. She wisely abstained from directly attacking her niece's opinions, but would, ever and anon, throw out serious hints, or make incidentally some grave observation which she hoped the holy Virgin would carry home to the heart of the poor stray heretic.

Agnes was quite aware of her aunt's intentions, and understood her tactics completely. To avoid anything like controversy, which, during the sorrowful days of Galama's unconsciousness, would have led to nothing good, and have been altogether out of place, she had received the baroness's hints as if she did not notice them. But the reason of that precaution had happily subsided, and she thought that she would be doing violence to her own conscience if she neglected to enlighten her aunt, whom she regarded as walking in a way from which she herself had fled with horror. So, feeling summoned, as it were, now to speak her mind, she said in a gentle voice :

"My greatest pain was, dear aunt, the uncertainty whether he was falling asleep in the arms of Jesus."

"Why, yes, of course," replied the baroness ; "but it is only the Church that lays the poor sinner on the bosom of Jesus, is it not?"

"Quite true," said Agnes ; "but I hope you agree with me, that every one who believes in Jesus is a member of the Church."

"Well—yes," said the baroness, hesitatingly ; "but explain yourself. What do you mean by that?"

"I mean to say," answered Agnes, "that every one who believes in Jesus has the right and the power—nay, that it is his duty—to commit the soul of an unbelieving friend to Jesus, to implore Him on behalf of that lost soul, to speak to that soul about its lost condition and about Jesus, and that thus he may be said to lay a poor sinner on the bosom of an all-merciful Saviour. And when he has so done, it may be said that the Church has done it through him, because he, as a believer, is a member of the Church."

"Oh, I see," said the baroness ; "well, yes, that is quite true in one sense, but it is

not enough in another. You know that Christ has ordained the priests of the Church to absolve us of our sins, and that we are not received by Him unless we go to Him through them, whom He has appointed. Therefore it was that I was so anxious to have them at our dear Karel's sick-bed when we expected the heavy stroke."

At this juncture a rustling was heard in the direction of the bed. In the fervor of their conversation the women had gradually raised their voices so that Galama could catch every word. Involuntarily they turned their eyes towards him, and saw him in a reclining position, looking at them with an expression of great attentiveness.

"What ! have you really had the priests about me?" he asked with a sarcastic smile. "How could you do such a thing, mother? I thank God that I need not trust my soul to their hands."

"No, Karel, we have brought no priest to your bed," answered the baroness. "It would have been risking too much ; but I hope our good Lord will vouchsafe better days to dawn upon us soon, when you will be able to kneel down at the confessional, to speak of the concerns of your soul to the priest of the Lord, without being in danger of your life."

"A sad religion, dear aunt," said Agnes, "which requires a poor sinner to wait for better days before he may approach his Saviour. We must have gone down fearfully indeed. Sixteen hundred years ago a poor dying thief, who found himself in the most wretched condition, was helped at once, in the twinkling of an eye. But he did not apply to priests, but to Jesus Himself, and that makes all the difference."

"Ay," said Galama, in a grave voice, "that is what I call true salvation ; 'To-day,' He said, 'thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.'"

"Just so," said Agnes ; "that is salvation by grace, without works, solely by the blood and the work of Christ."

Much as the baroness regretted the spirit her son revealed by these words, she did not deem it wise now to remonstrate with him about what she would call profane language.

not only perceived that he was too weak controversy, but she was also afraid that herself would not prove strong enough to end her position against two such opposites. So she kept silence, and being aware of the rather unpleasant position in which she was thus placed, she tried to make a pretext for leaving the room. In this she was unconsciously aided by her son, who said to Agnes: "Oh, do read that third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, in which it is so clearly shown that we are justified only by faith." "Then I will meanwhile go and look after the broth for you," said the baroness, rising. "I will be back in a few minutes."

While she left the room, Agnes took her New Testament, and read the desired chapter to Karel.

"Great, glorious truths," he said, when she finished; "is it not just what we want? Is it not just like God?"

"Oh, I am so thankful that you see it," said Agnes. "I now praise God with the deeper gratitude, because you are given back to us, not only to defend our political liberties, but the most precious treasure we have on earth—our religion, the saving Word of God."

"Well," he answered, "you see, Agnes, a man learns a great deal at death's door. I have found that I was a fool, trying to be a saviour to others while I was without a Sav-

iour myself. I saw that you were right when you said to me at Brussels, sin is a more terrible evil than the Inquisition. It kills the soul, and who can save from it but the crucified Son of God?"

"Oh would to God all the people who are now in arms against the Pope and the Inquisition saw that truth!" said Agnes, "as I believe the prince does; then I am assured that God would speedily give us the victory. But, as it is now, I am afraid our poor country will for a long time be bathed in blood and tears, because so many make flesh their arm, relying upon their own strength instead of making a covenant with the Lord of hosts."

"I believe you are right," said Galama; "but we must allow those people to swell our band, though they do not fight from the right principle. It cannot be helped, and I trust God will even use them as a means to destroy the work of iniquity; that those who love His name in sincerity and truth may be delivered out of their distress. I must confess that now I dread very much returning to the company of the Beggars. Their conversation was never very much to my taste."

At this juncture the baroness again entered, and the conversation took another turn. But the words which had then been spoken sank deep into Karel's heart, and produced their fruit in due season.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SAD STORY.

THE baroness had not been seated long when a knock was heard at the door, and a gruff voice asked for admittance. The door opened, and to the eyes of the somewhat astonished party was revealed the broad figure and smiling face of our old acquaintance, Hans. He was dressed in the attire of a servant of those days, which generally consisted of a doublet and trunk-hose of dark cloth, without collar or other ornament. The servants of the nobility, however, and of those who were entitled to the privilege, wore the livery of their masters, and then as now the arms of the family were emblazoned upon the buttons of the dress. To the astonishment of Galama and his mother, they perceived that Hans had assumed his old livery which he used to wear when waiting upon Karel in Louvain, but which he had laid off when he changed his cloth doublet for a steel corselet. He entered the room with a parcel under his arm, which he deposited in a corner, as soon as he saw the two women, whose presence he had apparently not expected.

Heartily was the welcome which Galama gave to his servant, for it must be mentioned that he had not seen him since the rescue, and he extended his hand to press that of his faithful follower. But Hans had always prided himself upon knowing manners, and before he deigned to accept Karel's hand he gravely made his bow to the ladies. The baroness answered his salute with a grave and pleasant movement of the head; but Agnes, who could not be so cold towards her prison companion, stretched forth her hand, at which Hans went down upon one knee, and impressed a most respectful kiss upon her fingers. Then turning to Karel, with the seriousness of an old lackey he said:

"Good-morning, Baron! When would you like to dress?"

The comicality of this speech, addressed as it was to the youth who could hardly sit called forth a laugh from all three.

"I do not think I shall dress for another month yet, Hans. You see how thin I am. In fact, I think I should hardly find cloth to fit me. But surely what I have lost in appearance you have won. You look better than ever. What have you been doing this time? for I hear that I have been ill a long."

"Well, you see, Baron," said Hans, "I have turned skipper for some time, and it is not a bad trade, I can assure you. It has suited me excellently."

"I seem to have risen in your estimation," continued Galama, shutting his eyes languidly. "I used to be plain Yonker."

"Ah," said Hans, with a grave shake of the head, "do you not know? You are the heir of the family now. You are the baron now, since your poor father died."

Karel smiled; for his father had been dead for years, and Hans had never thought of giving him the title before.

"According to that argument, I have been baron for some time, Hans."

"So you have," answered Hans, significantly; "only, don't you see, I came to this that, when your uncles were yet alive, and you had not over much money, Yonker was not sound so high as Baron. But now you are heir to all the estates, and that is something."

And he accompanied the suggestion with an expressive wink. But Karel shook his head, and said slowly:

"You are mistaken, Hans. There's a great-uncle in Friesland, Igo Galama, and his son. They are both alive. And then do you not know that our estates have all been confiscated?"

"Oh, that makes no difference. We shall get them back quickly enough," observed Hans, as if he had a whole army at his back. "I am thinking, Baron, that we are something like Alexander the Great, who could only be led at his heel, eh? I was rather too sharp on the duke in the Broodhuys. He could not get me."

"Oh, yes," said the baroness; "tell me how you managed that, Hans. How did you get in the Broodhuys?"

Hans made a polite bow to the baroness, and began:

"I went through the gate well enough. I frightened the soldiers on guard with my Latin, and my difficulty was to get inside the Broodhuys, where I was pretty well known. You never told me what arrangements you had made. So when I saw a sentry at the back-door, I waited on the opposite side of the street. Presently Gritta came out, and began talking to the soldiers, and taking my chance. At that moment I opened the window of the sitting-room, and jumped inside. I had seen beforehand that no one was there but Mistress Agnes; but she, Baron, upon my Beggar's oath, was all of a tremble at first and—"

Here Agnes cast a beseeching glance at Hans, which, however, he pretended not to notice, the more because the eyes of Karel were now wide open.

"And," he continued, "the first thing she said to me was, 'God be praised, it is not Karel.' And I said, 'Amen,' Yonker—Baron mean."

Karel threw a look of intense love at the girl who bent blushing over her work. The widow wiped her eyes, and Hans proceeded: "I am sure it was my Latin that frightened the fellows on the stairs, for they let me pass with hardly any molestation; but when we had arrived in the little room, both doors were locked, and we were caught."

Here Agnes looked up again, and pressing her finger to her lip, cast a look at the baroness. Hans took the hint this time, and was silent about Maria.

"They took me upstairs to the third floor, into a dingy little place in the front of the house, where I could see right over the

square. Here I had a visit from the original Father Florisz, who came out of compassion for my garb; for he still believed me to be one of his order led astray by heresy. I kept him in that opinion for a couple of hours; but as I knew only five sentences in Latin, and had to repeat them constantly, he began to smell a rat, I suppose; at least, he ended by excommunicating me, and delivering me over to all the devils in hell.

"Ah, Baron, I shall never forget the morning I passed in that room. I do not know whether they arranged it on purpose, but I could see everything as it happened. First, at daybreak, I saw the dim figure of the black scaffold, and as the sun rose and ascended higher, a crowd collected around it, and became larger every moment. At last, I do not know exactly at what time in the morning, I saw about two or three thousand soldiers march into the square, and take their position around the scaffold. I soon made friends with the soldier who was guarding me, and who had immensely enjoyed my taking-in of the old priests. He pointed out to me the different regiments and the officers, and where Alva sat, just opposite me, in the town-hall. At last I heard a stir in the house below, and I could see the crowd pressing and pushing the soldiers. 'Oh,' thought I, 'now the play is going to begin,' and sure enough it was; for a moment afterwards Count Egmont walked up the steps, followed by a bishop, I forget his name, and that fellow Romero. The count was dressed beautifully, and he looked a fine fellow and a hero to the very last.

"He walked up and down the scaffold with his head bent down, and stopping, said something to Romero, who shook his head. He then knelt and prayed, while the bishop knelt down beside him. Oh, I thought when I saw that, I wish I was in front of that scaffold, with the Yonker and some of our men, I would have made an attempt at any rate. But he got up again and took off some of his clothes, and then he knelt down on the cushion, and drew a little cap over his head. I have seen a good many executions in my time, and there have been some amongst them that were

very touching and awful to look at, but I never saw anything like this. You might have heard a mouse squeak, so silent were the people. It was just one white mass of faces, most of them with their kerchiefs or hands before their eyes, and some with open mouths, staring when he knelt down there in expectation of the blow, and looking as if they expected to receive it themselves. Suddenly a fellow stepped from behind some drape, and raised a tremendous sword. Several women lifted up their hands, others shrieked, and hugged their babies to their breasts, and cried over them. Then the fellow gave one blow with his sword, and I saw the head rolling away, and the blood flowing. Ah!" he continued, with a shudder, "I thought I would see both of them die; but when I saw that, I turned away from the window, and so did the soldier, and I could not look at Count Horn. It was horrible, horrible."

And as if the recollection of that tragedy had not lost its effect upon him yet, he wiped a big tear out of his eye with the back of his hand. There was a silence in the room, during which all were occupied with the melancholy death of the two noblemen. Karel lay upon his bed with his eyes closed, and a sad and gloomy expression upon his face.

"They have died as martyrs to Spanish treason," at last the sweet voice of Agnes said; "they have died for the best, and may God in His mercy have pity upon their souls."

"Amen," whispered all three.

"What puzzles me most of all," said Karel, after a moment's silence, "is that they should have thought of transporting you from Brussels to Ghent. Surely you were not such an important prisoner as either of my two uncles, or Treslong's brother, who were kept in Brussels."

"Well, I do not know," said Hans, in a tone somewhat offended; "there was not much to be got out of them, you know, Yonker. At least, they did not know as much about everything as I do, that is certain."

The point did not seem quite so clear to Galama as to Hans; but not wishing to disturb his servant's harmless conceit, he said:

"But Agnes? why should she be taken away? I do not suppose she knew anything, and does not now. I cannot understand it."

"Nor can I," said the baroness. "It seems to me so unlikely that you should be removed from the head-quarters of the Inquisition, unless it were for some deep reason or other."

"Ah, my lady," said Hans, with a knowing wink, "you've hit the nail, to my thinking. Look here, Yonker. These priests, you know, are just like that marsh, the Hel mouth as they call it; they are very deep and very dirty, but when you know the way, you can go through them as we went through the marsh."

Galama cast a rapid glance at his mother who was bending over her work, and said nothing.

"I think it was this way," continued Hans. "they wanted to catch all the Beggars while they were at the rescue; why else should they have had cavalry on both sides? I saw only one party when I was put in the coach, and the other must have been sent round before hand. I knew cavalry was coming, though why it stopped away so long I do not know. But that—that arch-traitor Block had a hand in it, I will swear."

"He had not, Hans. He was wounded himself, and escaped with difficulty to inform us of what he had heard; but for him you might now be a mangled corpse."

Hans was going to reply; but the baroness glanced at him as if to stop him, for she saw that the conversation was not pleasing to her son, and the doctor had told her that anything that might ruffle his spirit should be avoided.

"Never mind, Yonker," he said therefore in a light tone; "we shall pay them out soon. I saw Jonathan a week ago, and he told me that he was watching near the Rookery in the oak, when he saw soldiers approaching. He gave the cry, and the other sentry had his match ready when the soldiers, about fifty of them, surrounded the old tower, and half of them went into the vault, and began drinking our wine. All at once bang went the powder, and down came the tower on the top of them. At least half of them killed."

"A lucky thing the Beggars were not here," said Galama; "the place was suspected for a long while. How sad it is that we must obtain our liberty! I am almost sorry to get well again; and if it were for the sacred cause, I would have loathed my work long ago."

"I thought there was a letter, which you brought from the prince, Yonker," said Hans, directing his thoughts into another train; "has been delivered?"

"No! by all that's stupid! Forgotten." When turning to his mother, he asked her whether she could give him his doublet, in which Hans would find a letter. "You can deliver it, I suppose, Hans? It is to Master Jans, in Leyden."

"All right, Yonker," answered Hans, cheerily.

"Have you heard anything from Maria, Hans?" asked Agnes, anxiously, as soon as the baroness was away.

"Ay, that I have. The skipper went to the Broodhuys, and told her where we were, and she was ready to cling to his neck and go off with him then and there, only that it could not be. It was a great danger for him, you know. But she is to come next voyage, when she is going to take his wife with him; or if he can she will come over before that. May be she is on the way now. And then we shall all be here, Yonker. Your mother and your sister and your—h'm—your-a-cousin," he said, with a wink to Agnes, "and your humble servant, Hans. And then we'll call this Galama House, and you must be the baron."

Agnes smiled, but Galama shook his head, and said:

"No baron for me, Hans. A baron with a little house and a garden to boot will not do. We would get the oil merchant over the way calling himself duke if he heard of it. So, if you please, let us wait till we have carved out for ourselves another barony out of some province or other;" and he smiled ironically as if he were of opinion that that time would never come.

"Ah!" said Hans, fetching a deep breath, his face, which had fallen considerably during the Yonker's speech, lighting up with

pleasure. You will be strong soon, and then we shall go at it again for a count's coronet. Count de Galama does not sound bad, does it?"

"It does not depend upon me now," said Karel, casting a significant look at Agnes, who had looked sad when Hans broached the warlike plans of the future. "I shall thank God if we can emigrate, and live peacefully and quietly in England."

"And leave this unhappy country to its own fate?" said Agnes, in a low voice, bending over her work so as to hide from Karel the trouble which it cost her to utter words so contrary to her own dearest hopes.

Karel looked at her, and his eyes seemed to endeavor to pierce her bosom, and read what was hidden in its inmost recesses. It was clear that two feelings were dividing his heart, one of duty and one of love. He, too, acknowledged it his sacred duty to fight for his country, but opposite him sat the girl whom he considered it would be his greatest blessing on earth to make his wife; and how both could go together, he saw not. In the perplexity of his heart he sighed:

"I wish I had died instead of Count Egmont."

"I wish I had," said Hans; "that's what I said to the soldier, and he would not believe me. But I know that if old Egmont had been in Friesland, Alva would never have been able to make such a mess of Count Louis' army."

"What!" cried Karel, "What!" and he tried to raise himself up in bed, but fell back. "Count Louis' army! Tell me, Hans, you stupid fool! why did you not tell me before? What has happened? Answer me."

The reason why Hans did not answer was simply this. The news of the fearful defeat which Louis of Nassau's army had suffered, had flown through Holland, and spread a gloom wherever it flew. The two women had heard it also; but they resolved with one accord to keep it a secret from Karel until he should be strong enough to hear it, or until some splendid piece of news should counter-balance it. It was but recently that his consciousness had returned, and Agnes, who had

started the moment Hans mentioned Louis' name, now lifted up a terror-stricken face to Hans, upon which it was plainly written that she implored him not to tell any more.

But the dam was broken, and the river rushed impetuously through the breach. The Yonker had recovered so much of his strength as to show some of his old imperiousness, which, as a rule, proved irresistible to Hans.

With a sulky voice, and very reluctantly, he began :

"I will tell you all I have heard, Yonker, for I know you would not be content with anything less. The count, like a fool, posted his army with its rear resting on the Ems, quite near the Dollart. Now his army was not only smaller than Alva's, but consisted of hired troops without pay, and as I said to Hoofd, who told it me, I would like to see the man that could make me fight if he did not pay me for it, or allow me to pay myself. Now, then, here was the count with his troops all in mutiny, because, as I said, they were not paid, and the count would not allow them to plunder ; for surely he could not allow his own countrymen to be robbed. If they had been Spaniards, you know, it would have been quite a different thing. But if I had been the count, I would have taken boats, and crossed the Zuyder Zee ; for Alva could not have followed so soon, and—"

He stuck in the middle of his sentence, and looked confusedly at Agnes and then at Karel. The poor fellow had attempted to fabricate a tale while he was holding forth ; but his usual talent forsook him, and he broke down.

"In Heaven's name, tell me what has happened. Cut down,—dead,—what?" said Galama, in a terribly anxious voice.

"Ay, Yonker," said Hans, savagely, "beaten. The cowards would not fight, they would not even fire the guns. The duke was upon them in a moment, and chased them into the river or killed them. Every man-jack of the whole army has been killed, except the count and a few others. But Treslong and the whole batch of them are dead. That's all."

"Great God," cried Karel, growing deadly pale. "Count Louis defeated!—Treslong—"

Agnes rushed to the bed. Karel had fallen back in a swoon.

At this moment his mother came into the room again with his doublet, which she threw over to Hans, and ran to assist Agnes at the bedside. Hans soon found the letter, which was addressed to Master *Borsels*, *Mercurius*, the assumed names for Paul Buys and Leyden.

"Ah!" muttered Hans to himself, "I shall go with this. They know how to manage him better than I do. What a fool I was! I only hope he is not seriously ill. And I shall have to take these clothes away too. Well, I do not know but they would be some what too large for him now, seeing that they belonged to the old baron, his father."

And taking his bundle, Hans was soon in the disguise of a hawker on his way to Leyden, whither we shall not follow him.

Thanks to the care of his mother and Agnes, Karel was soon brought to life again and found himself none the worse for the sudden intelligence, as far as his body was concerned. But he acknowledged that the affairs of his country were now in a far more desperate state than before, that it required his help more than ever, and that the first step towards being enabled to give that help was to lie still and become strong. Still he lay therefore, and soon fell into a healthy sleep.

When he awoke, it had grown quite dusk, but in the evening twilight he could see the figures of Agnes and his mother engaged in earnest conversation. They spoke in a whisper, that they might not disturb his sleep, one of which he had awoke without their perceiving it. The baroness held something glittering in her hand, but what it was he could not distinguish.

"This is my husband's chain, I am certain," said the baroness, looking down upon the object in her hand. "I cannot conceive how it got into that man's hands."

"I recollect his face," said Agnes, musing, "but where I have seen it I cannot say. The moment I saw it I recognized it. Where have I seen him?" And she put her hand to her forehead as if to bring some old recollection back to her mind.

"Let me look at the chain, mother," ounded Karel's voice.

The widow started, and after a moment's esitation handed the gold chain to her son. t was the one Karel had given to Block previous to the rescue. He recognized it at once.

"What," he cried out joyously, "has Block een here? Who gave you this, mother?"

"Be quiet, Karel, and I will tell you. bout two hours ago the servant told me me one desired to see me. I went down-tairs, and found a tall, dark man, dressed as Spanish soldier. He told me that he had e honor of your friendship in Brussels, and at he once saved your life; that you gave im this chain, and told him that at any time, he happened to be in Brill, I would wel-me him. He said he was a fugitive, and ranted a few days' shelter. Could I give it im? I told him that you were lying ill up-tairs, which he seemed to know; that I ould give him no answer till I had spoken ith you, but that I would be very glad to entertain him for the moment. He politely declined my offer, and said he would come ack in three hours, and bring me a pleasant urprise. What is his name do you say, lock?"

"No, Block. Gerard Block. One of the eggars, and one of the best, too.

"What will you do?"

"Take him in here, of course, if it be for year. Where there's room for one there's oom for two, mother; that's our old Frisian roverb, is it not?"

"I cannot say that I like his face," said the aroness. "There is something decidedly mpleasant about it."

"Are you going to take him in here, are you?" asked Agnes. "That traitor, Block."

"Traitor! who calls him traitor, I would ke to know?"

"Hans does. He says he is sure the hole attempt to rescue the count was be-rayed by him. Hans hates him with deep atred."

"Hans is a great ass. He hated him from he very first because he wanted to give him-self airs before Block, who is a gentleman,

and who showed it too. A traitor indeed! The man saved my life, and was wounded in the rescue which Hans says he has betrayed. Do not let him say it to me."

"But was not his conduct very suspicious at all times?" asked Agnes.

"Suspicious! Agnes, I am astonished to hear *you* say so. He rescued you, too, and dressed the wound which that fool of a Hans gave you. I see the mark on your neck yet. You will have an opportunity now for thank-ing him. Did you say you had seen him be-fore? You saw him then, in the forest."

"I did not, I am positive; but—" She paused, for her heart spoke against her offer-ing any more objections to the preserver of her life and that of her lover.

Here the servant announced that the same soldier was again downstairs.

Agnes left the room, and a few moments af-terwards Block appeared, and having made a low bow before the lady of the house, he kneeled down by the bed, and grasping Karel's hand, cried out:

"My friend! Yonker Galama! The holy Virgin be praised I find you still amongst the living!"

With as much strength as Karel could muster, he returned the cordial pressure of Block's hand, and expressed in words what he felt in-deed, a sincere joy at seeing him back.

"I think, madam," said Block, turning to the baroness, "you will find some one down-stairs, whom you will like to see. It is the surprise I spoke of."

At this moment a sort of shriek or excla-mation was heard downstairs.

"What," gasped the baroness, "is it—my daughter, Maria!" and rushing downstairs, she soon found herself in the arms of her sob-bing and trembling daughter.

"We made the flight from Brussels to-gether," said Block, smilingly, to Galama, when they were alone. "And it was tough work, too. But how, when, and where it all happened, I hope to tell you to-morrow, if you will allow me shelter here for a few days, till I can get a chance to go to sea."

The request was granted with every readi-ness and cordiality.

The serpent had been taken to the bosom, and immediately set about coiling itself round the heart, which it intended to explore and then sting to death.

When Block recovered from the blow which Hans had dealt him, he had returned to Brussels once more to report his failure, which was this time the fault of the officer in command of his horse, who had waited too long ere he came down amongst the rescuers.

Both Block and the inquisitor resolved to wait, since all researches for Galama contin-

ued fruitless. They had at any rate a sister of his still in their hands, and they rightly conjectured that ere long she would be made acquainted with Karel's whereabouts. Both, however, had come to the conclusion that violence should only be used in the greatest extremity, and that Galama was more likely to betray the secret of the correspondence to a friend than to a foe. How their plan has already partly succeeded has now been shown; how the master in the art of deception, Block, succeeded further will be shown hereafter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BAD NAME FOR THE DOG.

A FEW days after the above occurrence we find Gerard Block pacing with catlike steps up and down the room in which Karel Galama was still confined to his bed. He slept, and the regular heavings of his breast showed that his sleep was calm, and in no way disturbed by the presence of the vampire who hovered around him. The reception which Block had met with had been cordial in the extreme so far as Karel was concerned. He would not hear of anything but that the saviour of his life should sleep under his roof—nay, in his own room. His mother, who could never resist his obstinacy, and would not even have done so now had she been able, because of his illness, granted the request, and Gerard was from that hour an inmate in the house.

Nor could it be said that he made himself anything but agreeable and useful. It appeared that he had practised medicine, for he prepared a draught for Karel, which, as the latter declared, did him much good. He treated his wound, too, and with so much success that, to everybody's comfort, the patient became better every day, and the barber could be dispensed with. He was, at the same time, of very little inconvenience to the household, and excellent company for Karel. In the evening he rolled himself in his mantle, and slept on a simple mattress as soundly as any one.

The baroness was soon entirely won in his favour by his great piety and extensive reading, as well as by his patriotism. Agnes lost her antipathy, in a great measure, by his politeness and his evident love and admiration for Karel. Maria, who had arrived with him, seemed to look up to him with an amount of reverence—nay, of awe—which could easily be explained by her mother and cousin, seeing that he had been instrumental in delivering her from Brussels. So the

women were thankful, on the whole, that Karel had such a good and faithful nurse, who at the same time was his physician. It happened sometimes that he went out after dark, and returned late at night, when he always had some curious piece of the latest news of some of the little pamphlets which, despite the terrible punishment that followed their sale, yet found their way by thousands into the families of the land.

So Galama slept calmly, and the women below spun and embroidered and chatted, and were very pleasant together. But if any of them had been in the room where Block was, as unseen spectators of his actions, it is probable they would have felt a little more uneasy. For why should our honest friend Block open every drawer of the large oaken cabinet which stood in the room, and shuffle and sniff into every corner of that extensive warehouse of linen, the wealth, the comfort, and the pride of every Dutchwoman in those days? He surely did not want to set up a house for himself, and take an inventory of what would be required beforehand? He hardly looked at the linen, but snatched with eager movement at every bit or scrap of paper or parchment he could find, and after having read it, threw it away with an exclamation of disappointment. His work did not seem to prosper; for after having ransacked everything in the room, chairs, pictures, hearth—nay, the bed upon which our patient lay—he folded his arms, and looking thoughtfully at Karel, said to himself:

"He will not awake for an hour yet; my draught has worked well this time. Where can that letter be? I am sure he had it in the Rookery, and he cannot have delivered it himself. I wonder whether Hans has gone with it. I have not seen him at all. If I had that letter, it would explain a good deal, I am sure; but it is not here, that is clear."

Now let me see what I have to do here. Above all things I must get Hans away. They must quarrel. The Yonker, I think, suspects him a little already. 'Then shall I put the girls away too?—Dangerous. He might grow suspicious. Let me see," and he began pacing up and down the room. "Yes," he continued at last, "that's the way. If they do not grow suspicious, they can remain; for if, after all, I can get nothing out of him by talking, I will seize him and put him on the rack, and then they will come very handy; for I have seen enough of him to know that he would not breathe a word to save his own life. I must be cautious, though, for he is not a fool. Let me think it over again."

The sun was sinking in the west when Karel awoke out of his deep sleep. It had been a magnificent day, and the heat even at that hour of the evening was oppressive. But a deliciously cool sea-breeze played through the open window, and brought with it the perfumes and odors from many a tarred bottom, laden with the spices and fruits of every land. It carried along with it the sweet smell of the hay and of many flowers. It wafted across the little town the various sounds of a summer's evening: the ploughman shouting to his beast to turn homewards; the merry lasses and youths haymaking in the fields; the boatmen calling to each other across the broad and stately Meuse, or the sailors singing a simple ditty to accompany their united efforts at the anchor. In that little corner of Holland everything breathed peace and quiet. And but for the soldiers who loitered about the streets, and gazed impudently at the women as they walked past or sat in their houses; and but for the hurried and almost reluctant salute which their officers received, one might have fancied that those stout and stalwart men, who sat and drank their beer in front of the alehouses, dressed in their wide baggy trousers, tied up a little below the knees, their closely fitting jacket, and the straw hat with broad brim, were naught else but the free and independent burghers of Holland a hundred years ago.

It was to be expected that such pleasant sounds, and so delicious and cool a breeze,

should gladden the Yonker's heart, and stir the awakening life within him. But his brow remained clouded, and an expression of sadness played around his mouth. He looked round the room. He perceived Block standing before the open window, but so that he could not be seen from without, with his arms folded, and apparently lost in deep thought.

"The evening seems to have but little charm for you, Gerard," said Galama, leaning upon one arm.

Block started. "And no wonder," he said, "when all around us seems so smiling, and I consider what is really hid under that smile. When I think that I shall soon have to leave again to fight against our common foe, instead of waiting that we might brave him together, it is no wonder that I should look melancholy."

"But who, my dear Gerard, has said that you should leave? Are the Spaniards so suspicious of your being here? Surely it will be time for me to leave too. Has my mother told you, or perhaps I have muttered it in my dream?"

Block shook his head.

"Then pray who has ventured to talk about your leaving us?"

"I did not say any one had, my dear Yonker," answered Block.

"Then why leave? You are safe here, wait till I am well again, and we shall go together."

Block shook his head again, and said with a sigh, "It cannot be, Yonker."

"And why?" Then, after a pause, "I am not afraid of any one in this house against you?"

"No," said Block, not yet; but—"He hesitated and stopped.

"But what?" fiercely asked Galama, who began to feel himself the head of the household. "but what?"

"Well, Yonker, since you insist upon knowing it, I fear they may be turned against me; and sooner than remain in a house where I am looked upon with unfavorable eyes—nay, perhaps with suspicion—I would rather throw myself upon a hundred sentries on the walls of Brussels, or die sword in hand for the king and my glorious country."

"But who would turn us against you?" said Karel. "We see no one; indeed, no one but the old surgeon and our servant know it you are here, and neither of them would think of saying anything against you."

"Oh, it is not from that quarter that I fear anything," said Block; "my foe has not acted yet, but in the kitchen this morning I accidentally heard that Hans was coming to me to-day. If that be the case, I must save you."

"Hans! what would Hans do to you?" he will not be disagreeable. He is a very good fellow when you know him well. You could make friends with him."

"With all my heart," said Block, cordially; "but I am almost afraid he will not. You know, my dear, there are some minds more disposed to jealousy than others; and it seems to me that good Hans fancies I have no right to be your friend."

"Now, is it not curious?" said Karel, not a little flattered at finding himself an object of contention. "I have often heard my soldiers talk about this feeling, and what misery can bring into the world, and I never felt it. Even the soldiers and captains round the prince are jealous of each other."

Block picked up his ears, but the prince said no more mentioned. "Ah," he said, "perhaps you have never had any one who stood between you and the object of your affection. I must confess I have but little of that feeling either, but Hans has a good deal. He thinks, because you have been very fortunate in your expeditions, and he has constantly been with you, that a great part of the credit is due to him, and that since his advice was not asked in our last undertaking, its failure is to be attributed to me."

"Oh, that is ridiculous," said Karel; "now when I reflect upon it, I must confess that it was a mad undertaking, and the most starting thing of all would have been its success. Never mind Hans, Gerard. He will not be so foolish; and if he is, tell me, and I will make him desist."

"Well," said Block, "I tried before to make friends with him; but he seems not very well bred, and he might insult me—a

thing which I can never brook. I have nothing against him; on the contrary, I think he is a splendid fellow. But he seems to be my sworn enemy, and I would rather leave you forever than be a source of discontent between you and so faithful a servant as Hans."

"Faithful or not faithful," said Galama, "he is my servant, and he shall honor whomsoever I choose to accept as friend. Of course, if you must go, go. I shall be the last to keep you. But be assured that the first impediment which Hans puts in your way shall be the signal for his dismissal. He ought to be here by this time. I wonder where he is." And then changing the subject, he said, "But you never yet fully told me how you managed to escape unhurt after the rescue. I thought you must have been killed."

"No; I have to thank Hans for that," answered Block. "He gave me such a good knock on the pate, that I lay as dead for some time. I suppose all the cavalry must have gone over me; for when I awoke, I found they had all passed me, and were trying to get into the marsh. All right, I thought, and I cautiously crept off the road and as far into the bush as I could. In the night I got to a woodcutter's hut, where I procured a disguise, and went into the country next day, thinking all of you had been killed or caught. About a month later I ventured into the city again, all the soldiers then being away, and got shelter with some friends. Fortunately, I found out your sister, who was desirous of fleeing too; so being afraid, indeed all but certain, that I was watched, we made our escape, and came here."

"Ay," Galama said, "you must remain. Here, I suppose, comes our friend Hans," he added, as a knock was heard at the door; "now for the opinions of this mighty foe of yours, Gerard. Come in!"

It was indeed Hans. He was dressed in the same disguise of a hawker in which he had left Brill, and to judge by the bespattered and dusty state of his clothes, he must have newly arrived from his journey. He seemed prepared for the presence of Block, for he

looked unusually grave, and the dark look which he gave him as he stood at the window farthest from the bed, boded him no good. With that exception, however, he proceeded as if nobody had been in the room but his master. He passed by Block without as much as turning his head, and halting before the bed, said in a voice of gayety which was plainly forced :

"Good-evening, Yonker. Still in bed, and that in this glorious weather? It would have been far better for you to have been outside, methinks."

"I can dispense with your thoughts, Hans, and would have a little more of your good manners. See you not a friend of ours behind you, and you greet him not?"

"A friend of ours?" repeated Hans, slowly turning round and eying Block from head to foot. "Oh, indeed, Master Block! Come to life again? Have you come to tell us that there was cavalry after all?"

"I have come to thank thee for thy timely blow, friend Hans," said Block, in a condescending tone; "for though it was ill-meant, it was certainly the means of saving my life. And I would feel pleased by thine acceptance of a couple of ducats wherewith to drink my health the first time thou canst get a chance;" and he held out two silver ducats.

"Nay, friend Block, thou'dst better drink thine own, and pay for it with honest gold," said Hans, coolly extending two pieces of gold between his finger and thumb.

"None of thy impertinences," cried Galama, his cheeks flushing with passion. "Give this gentleman a good-evening, or hold thy tongue, and do not insult my guests."

"Nay, Yonker, we are equal," said Hans, in a respectful tone, turning his back upon Block, "since he is no more than a Beggar, and I am no less."

"You have been long gone for so short a journey. Where have you been?" said Galama, subduing his anger.

"I have been to Brussels and back," said Hans.

"To Brussels? Why there? And what is the news?"

"Oh, news enough. The duke, as usual has mixed the foolish and the wise up together. He has done a wise thing in hanging a great rogue, Provost-Marshal Spelle."

"And what is the foolish thing?" asked Block.

"He has left a greater rogue unhung," answered Hans, speaking to Galama. "I was told by our confederates that one wretch of a jail-bird, who, like Tittlemann in Flanders, was condemned to the flames, but saved his miserable life by turning traitor. And the black-haired cur seems to have entered among us confederates in order to betray our secrets."

Hans spoke slowly, and turned half round to Block behind him.

"I tell thee once more, Hans, none of thy insolent insinuations in my hearing," said the Yonker, "or thou shalt leave me on the spot. What has come over thee that makes thee so untoward? Thou comest from Leyden. What is the news?"

"From whence?" said Hans, in great astonishment, while at the same time he sounded a very soft "hush!" through his teeth.

"From Leyden! Treat me not as if I were a child. Tell me the news at once. I have no secrets from my friends."

"Ay, from a friend, Yonker, I should not. But from a stranger hardly two months old I—"

"Come, Hans," said Block, stepping nearer, "let us be friends too. You have always looked upon me suspiciously. At first that could be pardoned—nay, it was laudable. But now we have surely seen enough of each other to cease doing it."

"Ah," said Hans, stepping aside as if shrinking from his touch, "I have seen enough of you indeed to continue doing it, and to make me believe that you are the most damnable traitor on earth."

Block's face flushed deeply, and he made an involuntary movement to his sword. But Karel, who had half risen from his bed, motioned with his hand to desist. The slow

nd fearfully earnest manner in which Hans poke seemed for a moment to awaken his suspicions. With one effort, almost too much for his not yet fully recovered strength, he suppressed all anger, and said to Hans :

"Hans, your suspicions of Master Block are terrible, or perhaps they appear terrible because you hide them behind insinuations. Give your grounds. Speak out, and either you or he shall leave this house to-night."

"They are hardly suspicions now, Yonker," said Hans, gloomily, "but certainties. What ill-luck and defeat has been our share since that man came to us recommended by a false name? Ever since I have seen him, he has watched you as a cat watches the mouse with his eyes that gleam like the devil's. That some one has betrayed our enterprise in Brussels there is no doubt. And he who knew so much about the news, who took one of the leading posts, and escaped twice unhurt, he is the traitor, I will lay my life. All the Beggars were known to each other, but he was known to none, and he is the one we all suspect, because he is the only one that could have betrayed us."

"Ha, well have you said, Yonker," interrupted Block, "that his suspicions are terrible because they are hid behind a cloud of insinuations. But since you choose to speak such language, fellow, let me say that your own conduct is far more suspicious than mine. How did you spend the hours while we were inside the city ere we came to the Rookery? We do not know; but the Yonker was beset by soldiers, and it was with difficulty that I saved him from their hands. And pray how was it that when the noblest bird of our flock, my Lord de Treslong, declined to go to the Broodhuys that you went shyly, so that you might receive no harm upon the wall? And who, I pray you, procured such immensely thick carriages that would take a long time in opening? your carriage was opened quickly enough though; but to your great disappointment, I suppose, you failed in killing Mistress Agnes, who, but for my help, which you grudged her, would have bled to death there and then. And who knew all about the cavalry coming, and urged

us to flee, whereas, as I afterwards found out, the whole forest was full of soldiers? And who laid the Yonker in the wet hold of a leaking ship, where assuredly he would have died but for his mistress's nursing? I do not relish being an apple of discord in any place; but when I am thus taunted and insulted, I must spurn the accusations from me. I do not mean to say that you did any of these things. On the contrary, I believe you were quite honest in all you did; but what I want to show is, that any one's conduct may be brought under suspicion, and yours as much as, if not more than, mine."

Hans had listened to these words, calmly and benevolently as they were spoken, with a feeling of rage and astonishment; and when their sounds had died away, he turned to his master, and said :

"A sad rascal that I is he not, Yonker? Shall I just—?" And tapping on his dagger, he gave a mysterious nod in Block's direction.

But Karel's face wore a sad and troubled expression. He shook his head decidedly, and said in a tone of grief:

"Why should you be so silly, Hans? You have been with me now as long as I can remember, and you know I am not in the habit of making friends quickly. Shake hands with Master Block, and go and fetch some wine."

"Never," said Hans, with energy. "Shake hands! Never. I did not tell you, Yonker, that in the forest, at the rescue, when the cavalry was coming, this friend here said to himself, 'At last they are coming,' and that is why I knocked him head over heels. That shows that he knew they were coming."

"My dear fellow," said Block, in a merry tone, "you deceive yourself. If I knew they were coming, I should have been the last to sit there quietly, as if they were not. I should have made away quickly enough, I assure you, having only escaped from them two days before."

"Look here, Yonker," said Hans, who was not experienced in sophism, "this is what it comes to, I will not be here while that fellow remains. So now you must choose.

Will you tell him to go, or shall I silence him?"

Karel loved his servant sincerely, and it was but seldom that he refused him anything when he spoke in such earnest. But as in all his race the feeling of gratitude was very strong, he could not insult or even grieve the man who had saved his life. Moreover, Hans's decided tone somewhat irritated him, and thinking that his servant was not in earnest as to leaving, he said curtly:

"Do not be a fool. Go downstairs and get us some wine, and we will talk about old times."

"No, Yonker, I must have a definite answer. You must send that fellow away or—"

"I shall go," said Block, suddenly. "Good-by, Yonker. I have not much luggage with me. My mantle and my arms are all. I shall sleep in the hay, and may—"

"Stay, stop, Gerard," he cried out, as Block made a movement to the door. "Look you, Hans. You must cease that conduct; Block remains here, and if you do not like him, you must remain downstairs till I am better. Go."

Hans had hardly heard a word of this speech. He had intently looked at Block, who stood before the window. The sun had sunk, a gray twilight hung over the town, and the outline of his face could be distinctly seen against the dusk, revealing its sharp and angular proportions to the full. His lips were parted with a diabolical smile of pleasure.

"Block, Block, Block," muttered Hans, as if lost in thought. "I must find out Peter Blink, and see what he says, that is the thing."

Then, hearing his master's injunction to go, he turned to the door. With the door in his hand, he paused, and, once more approaching Block, stretched out his hand, and said:

"Good-evening, Master Block. Good-evening. You have not seen the last of me yet;" and he shut the door.

Agnes and Maria were alone in the sitting-room, the baroness having gone to vespers. Having changed some of his clothes, Hans went into the room to bid them good-by. Both looked up.

"What is the matter? You look disturbed," said Agnes.

"And well I may be, Mistress Agnes; I am going away for some time."

"Going away, Hans? You have only just come," said Maria.

"Ah," said Hans, with a significant look. "I want you two young ladies to take particular care of the Yonker. I have had a quarrel with that fellow upstairs, and now my master is angry with me. I told him he was a traitor, and I think he is trying to do something with the Yonker; so be on your guard, and do not leave him. I am going to find Peter Blink, and then we shall see what he is."

A moment later he had left the house unnoticed.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN OLD FACE.

Two nights after Hans had left, Agnes and Maria were sitting alone in the room below. The two girls loved each other dearly; and they were the whole day together, they told their secrets, and laid their hearts open to each other. The baroness, who always looked back with regret upon the splendid past, which she longed to see restored, though she was proud of having lost it in the manner in which she had, could not enter into the spirit of the girls so fully as they did. She was moreover occupied with her household, which needed all her careful superintendence, and though she had but few acquaintances in the little town, between them and the observance of her masses she spent the greater part of her leisure. This evening she had as usual gone to the cathedral to attend vespers, and as Maria was not well enough to accompany her, she left her behind with Agnes.

Agnes sat with her arms folded in her lap in a musing position. There was an expression of sadness in her beautiful eyes as she looked at the figure of her companion. And it was a sight well worth looking at. The golden light of the departing sun, reflected by the clouds, surrounded Maria with a soft ethereal light. It shed a kind of halo around the fair locks that dangled in profusion over the bodice of spotless white which vainly strove to hide the whiteness of her bosom. The red eyes, and the nervous manner in which she worked at her spinning-wheel, as if by rapid work to stop the thoughts which came crowding into her little head, told a tale of inward agitation and restlessness. The bright spot upon her cheeks, the brightness of her eyes, told a tale even more sorrowful and more disquieting.

As the light grew dimmer, she bent more closely over her work, and one or two silent tears, which she wiped away as quickly as

they came, were the only language she spoke. But they spoke to Agnes with a deeper meaning than words. She laid her hand gently upon Maria's arm, and when the latter raised her head with a shy and nervous movement, and looked at her cousin as if to ask her meaning, Agnes said in a tender tone:

"You will spoil your eyes, dearest Maria; it is getting too dark. Lean your head upon my shoulder, and let us have a talk. I have to ask you something, and I want all your attention.

Maria did as she was bid, and silently laid her head upon her cousin's shoulder. There seemed to be a mutual understanding between the two. Maria looked up to her cousin's high-minded piety and courage with admiration, while Agnes regarded the weak, trembling little bird with feelings akin to those of a mother. She felt that it was her duty in a great measure to lead, and as she knew that the other would follow, she fulfilled her duty with prayerful conscientiousness.

For some moments she looked lovingly at the fair head that rested against her, and bending down she imprinted a tender kiss upon her forehead. It was hot, and so was the little hand that stole into hers at that moment.

"When I sit, on a summer evening," said Agnes, "and see the sun setting, and hear the various sounds that come to us through the quiet air, I always call to mind the days of my childhood, when I used to play the whole day in happy ignorance. I see the same things, I hear the same things, but with what different eyes, with what different ears! I remember one day, when I could not have been older than five years, a scaffold was erected on the square in front of the Broodhuys to execute some malefactor, and I re-

member well how I played around it, with some other children of my age, and asked my mother whether we could not always have it there, as it was so nice for hide and seek. Little did I think then that some years after I would look upon another scaffold, such as I saw two months ago."

"I wish we could always remain children, Agnes, dear," said Maria, with a soft voice; "I often wish that we might play together such as we were then, and never, never alter."

"But, Maria," said Agnes, pensively, "if childhood has its charms, it has also its drawbacks. I think that to be entirely ignorant and careless of what goes on around us, to know little or nothing about the Word of God and what He did for us, and to have others bearing that responsibility which properly and justly belongs to us only, are surely not the reasons that should make us wish to return to childhood."

"But is it not unjust," said Maria, "to give us duties and responsibilities greater than we can bear? We are in this world, and we must do something; but when we look up to what we should do and what we must do, it looks to me as if these were as high and as insurmountable as the tower of the church of our Blessed Lady."

"Maria, Maria," answered her cousin, in a grave and yet loving voice, "do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do you believe that He died to bring you to heaven? and do you believe that He would make the entrance to that heaven an impossibility for you? Has He not promised to help you in everything, however difficult it may be? I know that if we were left to ourselves we would do nothing. If the burghers of Holland could remain rich and free by sitting still, they would not fight. And so it is with you and me. We *have got* heaven, we are saved, but we must work and suffer to keep what we have; and if Jesus suffered and did so much for us, our part is surely little in comparison. But then, my dear Maria, you should not look at what you are required to do first. Look at Jesus, look at the glorious things which are ours; and after that, all things else, imprison-

ment, suffering, torture, death, are nothing. Oh, I wish I could read to you a part of the little book written by Dr. Luther, at Wittemberg. He says so plainly and yet so truly that if we look upon our own little cross first, our eyes get so dimmed with tears that we cannot see anything else; while if we look at the big cross at once, and at the immense sufferings of Jesus, our little crosses dwindle away to naught. Take courage, Maria, and go to Jesus at once. Not to His mother, for she did not suffer for you, but to Jesus, and He will help you."

Maria had listened to Agnes with suspended breath. It was plain that the words made a deep impression upon her. She was silent for some time. Then she said with a sigh:

"O Agnes, I shall never forget what I did in Brussels that night. Do you think I can still be forgiven?"

"My dear girl," said Agnes, "Peter denied it three times, and he was forgiven. Your greatest sins will be forgiven if you repent. Go to Jesus."

"Ah! but it was so very wicked of me just after we had read in the book, too," said Maria. "But I cannot tell you how much I have suffered from the thought of it. When I became conscious again, you were away, and I was told that I must go downstairs; I went into my bedroom, and I never came out of it until Gritta told me that you were to be removed. And when I saw you taken away, Agnes, for they would not allow me to speak to you, my heart sank within me, and but for that kind skipper and Gerard Block, who helped me to escape, I should perhaps have been dead now."

"I do not know," said Agnes, "but I can never look at that man Block but a strange feeling comes over me, at something which I cannot name. I have seen his face somewhere, I am certain, but where, I cannot recollect. I do not like him, I—"

A cough behind them made both girls start with a slight cry of alarm. In the doorway, and hardly visible in the indistinct twilight, stood Block, wrapped in a mantle.

"What do you want, sir?" said Agnes,

haughtily, rising; "know you not that you should not enter this room without previously knocking?"

"I crave your pardon, madam," said he, making a step forward; "I knocked thrice, and receiving no answer, I made so bold as to enter. I assure you I would not have done so had I known that it would be unpleasant to you, but I wish only to tell you that your cousin the Yonker is sound asleep, and I am going out in the dark to see whether I can gain any intelligence about our cause."

"Very well, sir," said Agnes, and Block withdrew.

A moment afterwards the front-door was heard to close, but Agnes remained in the same position, as if she had all at once been struck by some thought.

"Can it be possible?" she said to herself, "can it be the same face? Let me remember it again."

"Agnes," said Maria, anxiously, "what is the matter? You are quite cold, and you tremble all over, and you are breathing as if there is something that terrifies you; what is it, Agnes?"

"Maria," said Agnes, in a trembling voice, "I know now where I saw that face before. I am sure of it—certain. It was on that evening that Karel came suddenly into our room—you know the night previous to the one that everything happened—I saw him looking through the window. He drew back when he saw me, but I saw his face for all that; and it looked exactly as it does now,

in the same light, and I remember the same mantle too."

She stopped, and there was a silence in the room.

"Hans, too, has warned us against him. Who can he be? and what does he want?" said Maria, in a terrified voice.

"I do not know. Let us go and awaken Karel, and ask him. To-morrow night after dark we are going to Van Alphen, the grain-merchant's. Wouter Barends will preach, and there will be a good many friends there. We will ask them for advice."

"Will Wouter Barends be there?" said Maria, in accents of pleasure; "oh, do let us go. But let us go to Karel now."

And the two girls rose. At the same moment, Block slipped away from the door of the room, and disappeared through the front-door, which was ajar; for though he had shut it, he had not gone out, but opened it again softly.

"Aha," he muttered, "she has found me out, has she, and she is going to Van Alphen's to-morrow night? Very good, *very* good. She will get very little out of Galama to-night."

So it was. They tried in vain to awaken Karel, whom Block had drugged, and that evening and the next day they were in a fever of suspense. They resolved not to speak to the baroness until they had been to Van Alphen's. No sooner was it dark, therefore, than they set out, and left the house before the baroness had returned from vespers. Little did they know that they would never see her again.

CHAPTER XX.

A CONVENTICLE.

"COME, Dirk, make haste with that cart; it is past six o'clock now by the bell of the cathedral, and we have not half done our work."

These words were spoken by a buxom lass of some five-and-twenty summers, whose dress revealed her to be a servant-girl. She was engaged with another servant-girl and three men in clearing a barn, which seemed to be used as a warehouse for grain, for sacks and bags of every size and description were piled upon each other, and one large wagon full of flour-sacks was standing half-way in the open door. It was the barn of Van Alphen, the corn-merchant, a secret favorer of the new religion, in which that evening its followers were to come together. Its position for this purpose was exceedingly favorable, situated as it was at the back of his house, and separated from it by a yard. It could be approached by this yard, through the house, and also from the other side, where a small path, which led through Van Alphen's garden, allowed the people to come to it from the walls of the town unseen by any one. They were just engaged in putting three carts before the back-door, so as to hide any gleams of light that might shine through that night, and in arranging seats for the expected visitors.

"I hope there will be a good many come to-night," said Dirk, a tall broad-shouldered fellow, who was throwing the sacks about as if they had been empty. "There is no doubt about it that Master Barends is *the* man for us. He gives us good stuff, I can tell you."

"Yes, Dirk," answered the girls, sweeping up the floor, "you are right there. And I hope you will listen to him to-night, and take to heart what he says. For you know, Dirk, that you like a bit of fighting now and then, and that is not right."

"Ah, dash it all!" said Dirk, pitching a heavy sack on one side, "you women know nothing at all about what we men have to go through. Hand us that iron hook. Thank you. When I hear the Spaniards or the Catholics talk against the prince, my blood gets up, you know, and I do not mind giving them a clout on the pate for it."

"But you should not, Dirk," answered the girl. "Does not the Bible say that you should overcome evil with good, and that vengeance is the Lord's? If you acknowledge the word as true, you should do what it says."

"Yes, Alida," said another of the men, who was a good deal older, "that is what I am continually saying to Dirk, but he will not listen. I say, if the Lord wants to revenge Himself, He will do it without him."

"Just help me to lift this board here on to this stone. Now I will tell you what it is," said Dirk, after they had adjusted a board so that it formed a seat for some four or five persons. "It is just this: I know very well that Master Barends is speaking the truth, and I do not believe any more in priests, and absolution, and the Pope, and the holy Virgin, than any of you. But if that Bible tells me that I must not fight against the Duke of Alva, and that the Prince of Orange is a scoundrel, I say it is wrong, that is all."

"But it does say that you must not fight, Dirk," began the girl, when he interrupted her.

"Give me the text then. Chapter how much, verse what, eh? There you are, you see. Paul did not say so, and Peter did not; and I tell you what," and he paused to adjust another board, "if any of these soldiers come to-night and molest us, I—," and he flourished a formidable crowbar.

"Know you not that Jesus chided Peter

or using the sword, and cutting off the man's ear?" asked the elder man.

"Dost think we want more than four rows of seats? We shall not get many people; for the bloodhounds are sniffing," said Alida.

"I think it is enough," said Dirk. "Now tell you how I always looked at that story of the sword. Suppose you and I were walking together, and some soldier was wanting to take you, and I was to pull his nose, and then run away. 'Why,' you would say, what is the use of that? either kill him, or let him alone.' Now what was the use of Peter's cutting off that man's ear? That would not stop them from taking Jesus. But if he had put them all to flight, so that they dare not come back, may be the Lord would have said 'Right.'"

Here their help was invoked by the others, and their conversation ceased. But it may be remarked that Dirk was a sort of type of a great many of the inhabitants of the Netherlands, who had abandoned Popery and clearly saw its errors, but who, while they embraced Protestantism because of its truth, lacked either the inclination or the conviction to put all its injunctions into execution.

When Van Alphen's servants, who were all adherents of the new religion, had arranged the barn,—and the arrangement was very simple, consisting of a table with a chair before it and four rows of seats—they went into the house till dusk should come. When at last it came, the seats gradually filled. One by one the hearers crept in through a little side-door and took their seats, and the warmth with which they were welcomed showed that the saying still held true, "How these Christians love each other!"

Rich and poor, old and young, were mixed up without distinction, and conducted their conversation in a low tone; and when Van Alphen and the preacher, Wouter Barends, appeared, they were surrounded and almost overwhelmed with affectionate questions and greetings. They were both in the prime of life; Van Alphen was a tall, fine man, undaunted and honest in his appearance, while Wouter Barends was a thin man, who looked as if he had suffered much, with a face full of

sorrow, and yet with a marvellous expression of bliss and benignity in his clear bright eyes.

The meeting between him and Agnes and Maria, who had come among the earliest, was very touching, and the hearts of many were softened when they saw the pious man greet his daughter in the faith with a holy kiss. At last, when he had shaken hands with all present, he took his seat at the table, and opened the Bible before him. The table was very simple, and such indeed was the whole appearance of the place. The only light that illuminated this curious improvised chapel came from a kitchen lamp, which was standing on the table near the preacher's Bible. Nor was any more light required, for Bibles were scarce in those days, and hymn-books could not be used, as singing was dangerous. So the audience had nothing to do but to listen, and this they did with heart and soul. What the preacher said, it is true, was nothing extraordinary as to language, style, or eloquence; neither did it contain anything beyond the old fundamental truths of the Gospel. But these old truths were new to them, and the earnest belief with which the preacher proclaimed these truths made him more eloquent in the estimation of his hearers than the greatest orator was held to be by his audience in Athens or Rome.

"Mind, beloved," he said, among other things, "a great mercy is bestowed upon us, that we are deemed worthy to suffer for the name of our blessed Lord and Saviour. You know that He did not refuse to give His blood for us, to save us from the wrath to come. So we ought to be ready to give our blood for Him, to show that we count Him worth more than life itself. You also know that it has pleased God, in His boundless mercy, to permit me to bear in my body a few scars as a witness of His truth. I am outlawed by the priests, though I was a priest myself, and my relatives have cast me out, and I am hunted from place to place, being every day in danger of life, and in fear of death. But I thank my God that He gives me grace to rejoice with St. Paul at the prospect of being offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, if God should will it so."

"Only, my beloved, let me have this great consolation, that I may be assured that the word which I have preached to you, and which I am willing to confirm by my blood, has not been in vain, but powerful in the strength of God to pluck you out of the power of darkness, out of the errors of Antichrist, and to lead you to the only Mediator, even Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. For to know Him is life, and there is no salvation without Him; but any other mediator, whether pope, prelate, or priest, that places himself by His side or between Him and us, is a curse, and damned and destined to everlasting destruction. For our God is a jealous God and a consuming fire, who does not give His honor to another. But He is plenteous in mercy to those who, with broken hearts and contrite spirits, as poor lost sinners, come to Him through the only way, the new and living way which He has appointed, even the Son of His love. So then, my beloved, I beseech you—"

Here, suddenly, a soft rap was heard upon the back-door of the barn, and a voice whispered, "Alarm! the soldiers are coming."

Every one started to his feet, and looked at the others with suspended breath. Then the low and clear voice of Van Alphen was heard distinctly.

"My friends, listen one moment. Flee through this door, which will bring you into the yard. A little gate to the right of it will bring you to a garden belonging to one of us. Through that garden you can get into another and thus on to the Quay. I shall help Master Barends. Let the men help the women, and God help us all."

"Amen," said Barends.

The light was turned out, and the door opposite to that at which the warning cry had been given was opened. There was a little moonlight, and it enabled the reformers to see, although indistinctly, what they were doing. The seats were thrown down, or put hurriedly aside, and everybody crowded to the door. At that moment voices were heard at the back-door, and a command was given. Immediately the noise of wheels followed, a heavy blow sounded on the door, and a voice

cried, "Open this door." The trick of the servant in putting three large carts before the door had helped them but little, for they had already been removed.

"They are coming, Agnes!" whispered Maria, as they arose from the humble seat they had occupied, which was nearest the door, at which another blow and a louder injunction to open was just being given. Many of the people had by this time reached the yard, and fled into the adjoining garden; but not so Agnes and Maria. Having ventured to come without a protector, they were now left alone, and as they had but little experience of personal danger, they scarcely knew what to do, when a blow with the butt of a matchlock made the doors fly open, and some twenty soldiers entered the barn, headed by a priest who held a torch. The persons inside uttered a stifled shriek, and pressed into the yard; but the soldiers perceived them, and rushed off in pursuit. Before long they returned with some dozen men and women.

I shall not attempt to describe the scene that now ensued, illuminated as it was in a ghastly fantastic way by the red glare of the torch which the priest held in his hand.

The soldiers, with ferocious-looking faces, and in their frightful attire, seemed to represent a pandemonium. The men and women whom they surrounded could be likened to sheep which are being led to the slaughter. Some of the weakest wrung their hands in terror, and seemed ready to swoon away. Some, still under the impression of the word they had just heard, seemed to prepare with determined resignation for the hardships which they were expecting. Some of the more courageous joyfully and enthusiastically exhorted their fellow-sufferers to rejoice in God, and to continue steadfast in the faith. Among the latter was Agnes. Like a true heroine she stood in the midst of the dreadful confusion, beseeching Maria, who was ready to swoon away by her side, now to show her strength in Jesus.

"The Lord is with us," she cried; "keep up your courage, dear; with Him we are more than conquerors. He will not forsake us."

Her words were not in vain. Suddenly, as

if grasped by an invisible hand, Maria raised herself, and said :

"You are right. He who is with us is mightier than they who are against us ;" and looking Agnes in the face, she added with a smile, "if we die, we shall die together, shall we not ? but thank God that Wouter Barends is saved."

The two girls, whose appearance singled them out from the rest of the prisoners, immediately drew the attention of the priest.

"Are you Agnes Vlossert ?" he asked.

"I am," was the answer.

"And is that girl by your side Maria Galama ?"

The priest's look made poor Maria shudder. Her voice seemed choking in her throat.

"With what right do you put these questions ?" asked Agnes, in a dignified tone.

Her boldness so surprised the priest that he felt for a moment disarmed. Indeed, it seemed to inspire one of the male prisoners, for stepping forward, he said :

"And what is the reason why you have disturbed our harmless meeting ?"

"Harmless meeting !" repeated the priest, who had meanwhile resumed his insolence ; "full well you know, you cursed heretics, that your gathering is an abomination in the sight of God and all His holy angels."

"Why ?" asked the prisoner.

"Because — because — why ?" said the priest, working himself into a passion. "I have not come here to argue with such cursed dogs, like you ; you shall soon know it when you are on the rack."

"We have done nothing against God, nor yet against the King of Spain," answered the prisoner ; "we are as loyal as we are good Christians."

"Hold your tongue, you accursed heretic," cried the priest ; and turning toward a troop of soldiers, who had just entered the barn, he asked, "Have you found the preacher ?"

"The bird is flown," answered the sergeant ; "we have searched the house from top to bottom, but we have seen no living creature except an old grandmother and a baby."

"Well, then, let us go," said the priest ; "do your duty," he added to the sergeant.

Chains and cords were produced, and the men were fettered with the former, whilst the women were bound with the latter. Only Agnes and Maria were excepted.

"These are Sextus's two little doves," the priest said to himself ; and turning to the sergeant he said, "I'll take charge of these two ladies."

A moment later the barn was empty, and nobody knew whither the prisoners were conveyed.

CHAPTER XXI.

JUST MISSED.

WE shall not venture to describe the consternation of the baroness when on that evening the two girls did not return. On reaching home, after vespers, she had been informed by the old half-deaf servant that the two young ladies had gone out, and would be back in little more than an hour. She had then felt a sensation of fear, but resolved to wait calmly until they should return. But one hour elapsed, another passed, a third was sounded on the bell of the cathedral, and the girls came not. With a beating heart the poor woman then crept upstairs, and knocked at the door of the room where her son and Block were sleeping. It was opened by the latter, who was still dressed. Complying with her half-choked wish to come downstairs, he followed her, and calmly listened to the poor woman as she told him her fears and terrors, and asked him for advice.

What! the two young ladies not come home yet? when had they gone out? Three hours ago. They could have had no intention to elope or anything of the sort? No, none whatever. Did the baroness think, had she any suspicion that they were at all heretical? The baroness grew pale, and said she had. Perhaps they had gone to some meeting, which had been discovered! The baroness covered her face with her hands, and burst into a fit of weeping. Block, as a sympathizing friend, tried to console her. It might be nothing after all. Perhaps they had escaped and were at some friend's house. Or they might not have been at a meeting, and very likely they were safe at some friend's. What was the use of sorrowing before there was any reason for it? He would go out and find out all he could; he would be sure to hear of something. Oh, no, he must not leave her. He was at present her only help and protector, and her son would not be able

to do without him. But at last he prevailed upon the baroness to allow him to put on his mantle and creep out in the darkness.

He was absent for about an hour, during which time the baroness poured out her heart before her little crucifix, and soaked her kerchief with tears. When at Agnes's pressing invitation she had allowed Maria to go to Brussels, she had done so with a heavy heart. She knew that her daughter was timid and inexperienced, and though Karel, after his first term at Louvain, was in raptures about his cousin, she could hardly be prevailed upon to allow Maria to go thither alone. She deemed it necessary, however, that her daughter should see something of the world, but as she once for all had made up her mind never again to visit the capital, whilst as it was the seat of the tyrant's government, she gave her consent reluctantly. Since then she had spent her days in loneliness, hoping for her child's return, watching with eagerness the movements going on in the country, and dividing her time between religion, charity, and her friends. Now, however, she began to reproach herself for her carelessness in not sufficiently guarding her children against the dangers of heresy. She saw the evil, she felt already the approach of its dreadful consequences, she shuddered as she thought of what might yet become of them all, and she implored the holy Virgin to protect them.

When Block came back, he confirmed all her fears. He had spoken with five or six watchmen and one soldier, who had nearly discovered him, and from them he had learned that there had been an heretical meeting somewhere on the Quay, and that soldiers had come and taken everybody off. Whether Agnes and Maria had been there, and whether they had escaped or not, he had not been able to find out, but he would go

out again the next evening, and get more information.

Very little did the baroness sleep that night ; and when Galama saw her pale face and swollen eyes next morning, it was but a few moments until he knew all. He became half mad. He leaped up in bed, and but for Block would have leaped out of it. He insisted upon dressing and going to the magistrates ; he would give himself up instead of the girls ; he would promise to tell them the most important things ; he would force them, threaten them ; he would—and he buried his head in his pillow and wept.

The baroness prayed him to be calm and wait. The fate of Agnes and Maria was not certain as yet, and at any rate rashness would do no good. And Block, when Karel had become somewhat calm, put the case clearly before him, railed against the priests, insinuated something as if Hans had a hand in it, praised the two noble girls, grew intensely patriotic, but advised him to be quiet and get well as soon as possible. He would in the meantime try and find out where the girls were ; at any rate, find out something about them, and perhaps they might yet be able to get them back without imparting to the magistrates any secrets. Nor had he any difficulty in finding out plenty about the whole affair. The quiet little town of Brill had not had such a stir and excitement since the image of the Virgin in the cathedral fell upon one of the bishops and killed him on the spot. Every one spoke about it, every one pointed out who had been taken, every one wondered where the preacher and Van Alphen could have gone, and most people lamented the prospect of having to witness the execution of some of their fellow-citizens. They were spared the spectacle ; for, two days after, all the victims were taken away to Brussels, but, as Block, who told all this to the baroness and her son, asserted, Agnes and Maria were not amongst them. From that moment a gloom settled upon Karel's face, and he set himself with a determination, so to say, to get well.

He often jumped out of bed and walked round the room, as if nothing had ever been the

matter with him. He caught up a sword and began fencing with Block, and though he was soon disarmed, it was a warning to the Jesuit not to delay the execution of his plan much longer. Nor did he. In the long hours that the two were necessarily alone together, Block crept deeper and deeper into the unfortunate Yonker's confidence. He had already obtained some very valuable information, and he reasonably hoped to get all he wanted. But he was resolved to proceed cautiously, and not lose his game a third time. Nor were caution and care at all out of place.

It is true, in a moment perhaps of boasting pride, certainly of irritation, Galama had told Hans that he had no secrets from Block ; but when the heat of his emotions had vanished, and he was again the calm thinking Frisian, he acknowledged to himself that it would be as well not to tell his friend everything at once, but to wait till further events should make further disclosures desirable or necessary. Thus, as the Jesuit had rightly conjectured, where torture or the threat of death would produce nothing but scorn with the high-minded Dutchman, it was possible—nay, likely—that in moments of confidence and of mutual sympathy the youth might be made to hand the priest the key to that important secret correspondence, in which he had played such an active part, and which was doing so much damage to the cause of tyranny and Popery in Holland.

As the sources of the Jesuit's information were naturally very extensive, and the secret sign of his order procured for him a general assistance and obedience, he was able to use all the weapons which his craft and his system put into his hands. By degrees, as the Yonker's strength became greater, and his energy and courage required food, the Jesuit gave him the detailed news of everything that happened in the country. He wept with him over the account of the execution of his own uncles and the two counts. He stormed and raged over the terrible defeat which the Duke of Alba had given to Count Louis' troops. He bitterly cursed the same duke, who had imposed another tax upon the already so

heavily burdened inhabitants ; and he exulted whenever news came to Brill that one of the ships belonging to the Sea Beggars had seized a Spanish trader or damaged a Spanish troopship.

Thus, by degrees, did he spin his web around his victim. Thus, inch by inch, did he draw into the snare the unsuspecting patriot, who was already rejoicing in the glorious deeds which Block intended that he should never do. Thus each day the Frisian's heart became more and more entwined in the coils of his fascinating but venomous friend.

One evening, the baroness, after having performed her duties in the household with a heavy heart, went up to her little bedroom, which communicated by a door with the room in which her son and Block were sitting. The disappearance of the two girls affected her more deeply than she would acknowledge to herself. When she thought of them, her meek, her silent, her loving daughter, and her frank and noble-minded niece, she felt inclined to lie down and die. She went into her little closet, and throwing herself down before the image of the Virgin, passed her time in weeping and in fervent prayer.

Meanwhile Karel and Block had a conversation in the next room. The Yonker, who was almost as strong now as before, was sitting on a low chair near the window ; Block a little way from him and nearer the door which communicated with the baroness's room. An oil lamp on the table threw an insufficient light upon the two men. Their tones were earnest, and on Karel's side, somewhat passionate.

"And do you not think it a glorious thing to be fighting in behalf of our dear country and of the Church?" asked Block.

"Not I, Gerard. My great aim henceforth will be twofold : to free our country from the tyranny of Alva and from that of the Pope. Which of the two is most hateful, I know not, but both must be abolished," answered Galama.

"I acknowledge that there are fearful defects in our Church," resumed Block ; "but still we must remember that, notwithstanding these, it is the only saving Church. You

must be aware that even Count Egmont died in this belief, and that the Prince of Orange upholds it."

Block was right so far. Count Egmont had died a Roman Catholic, though Count Horn had refused the aid of the priest, and had died a Protestant. The Prince of Orange, though he, too, had become a Protestant, had not yet publicly intimated this great change in his religious views.

"Supposing your assertion to be true, my dear Gerard," said Karel, "I shall not attain to salvation by following the examples of all the counts and princes of the world. My only guide is God's Word, and when that tells me that all ideas about priests and a saving Church are wrong, what more do I want? But I deny that the prince thinks about these matters as you suppose. I have heard him say myself that real liberty and Popery cannot go together. Have you ever considered that question?"

"I have ; but I never came to that conclusion."

"And I know," continued Galama, "that the prince did not say that upon the spur of the moment, but that, with him, it was the result of deep thought and of careful observation ; and could any one call him a Papist, when he believes that the very principle of Popery is slavery itself?"

"Ah, Karel," sighed Block, "when you come into contact with such reasoners, and hear the arguments of such great men as the prince, it is no wonder that you become convinced and enthusiastic. I envy you in having been chosen for so honorable a post. Many a time I have lain awake of a night, thinking how I would employ every particle of my energy in doing the work that you have been doing. I would consider it the object of my highest ambition."

"If it is honorable, it is perilous also," said Galama, not a little elated by his companion's adroit flattery ; "every hour you run a thousand risks, every man you approach has to be looked upon with suspicion" (Galama might have reproached himself here) ; "your sword, your dagger, your pistols have to be ready at a moment's notice, and not once must your

heart give way before the stupendous task you undertake."

"I do not know," said Block, "whether your words imply a reproach or even a hint. I think I have given you sufficient proof that both my courage and my skill in weapons are sufficient for anything that may befall me."

"Nay, Gerard, you entirely mistake the meaning of my words," said the Yonker; "I would be the last person in this world to accuse you of anything like cowardice or incapacity, having had so evident a proof of the contrary in Brussels. But you forget that you know nothing of the dangers of which I speak, and that, not knowing them, you cannot tell whether you would be equal to the emergencies."

"You are mistaken, Yonker, when you imagine that I know nothing of them," said Block. "Have I not crossed the whole breadth of the land after I separated from Peter Blink to find you? And more than that, I am intimately acquainted with Herman de Ruyter, the *emissario*, as he is called by the Spaniards, and he has told me many things, which even you know little of."

"The *emissario*!" cried Galama, in a voice of pleased surprise, "do you indeed know him? You never mentioned his name before. What is he like? I have heard much of him, but I never saw him."

"I did not mention his name, because I thought you knew him," answered Block; "but to tell you what he is like is more than I can do. He is tall and broad-shouldered, with an immense muscular power and a clever head; that is all I can say. For the rest, he is like everybody and like nobody—a cattle-drover, a hawker, a beggar, a soldier, a priest, a farmer; even a woman he acts with an accuracy as astonishing as his courage is remarkable. At the same time, he is wonderfully good-natured and kind-hearted, and many a time has he risked himself in protecting a poor man or woman against oppression and cruelty."

"Ah, he has the privilege of holding direct communication with the prince," said Galama, with a little sigh, "which I only had so long

as he and his brother were in France with the Admiral de Coligny."

"But you had surely to employ many arts before you could see the prince?" said the Jesuit, who felt himself coming nearer the mark; "for I have heard that even he is surrounded by spies, employed by the Spanish Court and the Jesuits."

"Yes," answered the Frisian, "that was sometimes the most dangerous part of all; for it was possible that his nearest friend was his enemy, and no letter was ever delivered into any other hands but his own and those of Count Louis."

"Even his very secretary that wrote the answer might be a secret traitor, and paid by Spain," said the Jesuit, musingly.

"He had none," answered the Yonker. "It was beautiful to see his decision. He read the letters as soon as he could decipher them, and immediately sat down and wrote the answer himself, sealing it with his own ring."

"And did you always know the contents of those letters?" asked Block.

"Not I. And it was far better, too; for had I been seized, no information of any kind could have escaped me had I been tortured."

"But the letters would have been seized," the priest said, inquiringly.

"What of it? Firstly they were written in cipher, then every town had a different name—"

"And men have different names too, sometimes," sounded a deep voice behind them.

Both looked up. The door was open, and about a yard within the room stood a man wrapped in a large cloak and with a felt hat on. The faint rays of the lamp failed to make his features distinguishable at the distance at which he stood.

"What means this intrusion?" said the Yonker, frowning, as he rose from the arm-chair in which he sat.

"No intrusion, I hope, Yonker," said the stranger, making a few steps forward, and taking off his hat. Both at once recognized Hans. "I have only come to pay you a friendly visit," he continued. "I could not

so soon forget the old connection between us, and I have come to beg your pardon for all the wrong I have done you, and you too, sir," he said, turning to Block, "and," he continued in a slow and significant tone, "I hope to make amends for what I have done."

There was a mixture of hatred and playfulness in the look which he cast at the Jesuit. The latter sat immovable, with one hand resting upon the table, while the other played with the hilt of his dagger; his face was cold, and he returned Hans's look with one of haughty defiance and disdain. Galama, on the other hand, sat in his chair, restless, and like a young horse chafing under the harness. He opened his mouth once or twice to interrupt Hans, frowned, looked calm again, and apparently was at a loss how to treat the newcomer. Hans soon helped him out of his dilemma.

"In the few weeks that I have been away, Yonker," he said, "I have got hold of some very important information. I have heard that neither my Lord de Treslong nor your great-uncle Igo died in the battle of Jemmingen. So far, therefore, we may rejoice. But excuse me, Yonker, will you allow me to bring in a fellow Beggar that I have brought with me? He is a friend, at least an *acquaintance* of both of you, I think—"

"Ay, ay! Hans, don't call it friend," said a voice which came from the door.

"Here he is," said Hans; "he has not waited for your consent, apparently, Yonker. But I suppose you will have no objection. Come in, Peter. It is only Peter Blink, gentlemen."

Both men turned their eyes a second time from Hans to the door, and beheld a figure which at other times would have evoked general laughter. It certainly was the figure of a man, but its proportions were somewhat out of the common. A little fat body, supported and flanked by a magnificent pair of legs and arms, which threw and flung themselves in all directions, and would have been long enough for a man of twice his size, short thick neck and a round head, the hair, the beard, and the chubby cheeks partaking largely of the fiery

hue, presented a man whose appearance was sufficiently peculiar to be remembered when once seen. The general impression which he made was one of good-natured stupidity; but those little gray eyes of his, which darted all round the room, and had taken in everything at a glance ere he had reached Hans's side, spoke a direct contradiction to this first impression. Four words will suffice to give the reader a proper idea of what he really was. He was very cunning, very quiet, very strong, and very brave; thus, though nobody suspected the fat-cheeked farmer, who sat in a corner dozing or quaffing his beer, and many amused themselves at the expense of the dwarf who sung old ballads for a few groats, yet many a one felt the strength of his arm when at the head of a select band he acted promptly and cleverly upon the information which he thus picked up. Swinging his long arms, and taking immense strides, he stood in a moment by the side of Hans, and made a bow to the Yonker.

When the Jesuit perceived the figure of Blink in the doorway, he turned ashy pale. A look of ferocity and hatred came over his face, and his hand spasmodically grasped the cup of wine on the little table. Hans, who had eyed him attentively, smiled slightly when he saw this, and looked at his former master, who did not seem to notice it. When he looked back, the priest had composed himself. He lay back in his chair, and eyed the new addition to their company with perfect calmness.

"There must be some mistake here," he said slowly. "If this man's name is Peter Blink, it certainly is not the Peter Blink who recommended *me*."

"Ah, but it is the Peter Blink who wrote the letter," said Hans, "eh, Yonker?"

"Certainly," said Karel, jumping up from his chair, and grasping the dwarf's hand. "How do you do, Peter, my old friend? As brave and as stout as ever?"

"Blooming, Yonker, thank you," said Peter, with a gasp.

"And do you really not know this gentleman?" he asked, at the same time turning to the Jesuit.

"Well enough, well enough," said Peter, and added with a chuckle, "too well!"

"Perhaps the gentleman would like to sit down, so that, at any rate, now we can make acquaintance," said Block, half rising, and at the same time moving his chair a little nearer the door.

"Thank you," said Hans, placing a chair for Peter, "now that you mention it, and the Yonker has no objections; take a chair, Peter. I prefer standing—that will help us quicker through the business." And he placed himself in such a position that he could prevent any movement the Jesuit might make upon his master.

"Have you no brother or relation who bears the same name as you do, Master Blink?" said Block, in a tone as if he desired to begin a friendly and interesting conversation about common topics.

"No," said Blink. "Only one, Peter;" and stretching forth his hand he seized the can of wine, and took a vigorous draught of its contents.

"Suppose we refresh your memory a little, Master—h'm, Block, is it not?" said Hans. "Perhaps you do not remember seeing this gentleman in the city of Amsterdam, where he pulled you out of the canal into which you had been thrown by some of your enemies, of which, now that I come to think of it, you must have a good many. Was not that the case, Peter?"

"Right, Hans. Out of the Spuy, near St. Clovis's bridge," answered Blink, taking another refresher.

"And perhaps you do not remember how he carried you, wet as you were, to his own house, and nursed you there; and perhaps you do not remember either, how one day, when you were nearly better, you heard this gentleman here and a friend of his, Gerard Bock, talk about Yonker Galama. Eh, Peter?"

"All right, Hans! Go on," encouraged the dwarf.

"And of course you forget how, when you saw Peter write the letter of recommendation, you got out of the house at night, and had both him and Gerard imprisoned in the

morning, while you walked off to the Yonker with the scrap of paper. Is not that correct, Peter?"

"Beautiful," answered Peter, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand; but whether this referred to Hans's tale or to the contents of the can, which he had by this time removed, we cannot say.

The Yonker, in the meanwhile, had watched and listened to the dialogue in silence. He breathed heavily. His eyes stared now at one of the speakers, then at the other, then at the Jesuit, while his color came and went alternately, as the gravest suspicions, the darkest forebodings, or the slightest hope that he was dreaming, or that it was a mere trick, were uppermost in his mind. When Hans had done speaking, he looked at Block, who lay in his chair eying the two men with calm indifference.

"I do not know," said Block, "what object you may have in passing off a damnable imposture upon me, but this I will swear, that the Peter Blink from whom I received my recommendation was a different personage from this miserable, wine-drinking, fat-faced dwarf, who looks as if he could not count three. I hope the Yonker does not suspect me of such ingratitude; but to give him better proof of my innocence, let me get the letter which is in my cloak on the door."

He rose. But Hans stepped between him and the door, and extending his arm he said:

"Do not trouble yourself. You cannot get out that way. There is one of the Sea Beggars at the top and another at the bottom of the stairs, and both would run you through the body if you attempted to pass them. I have been cautious this time. But we will dismiss this little business of Master Blink's for the moment, and suppose that you have been noble and grateful towards him. You cannot get away yet, so have patience."

"That's right, Hans, my boy. There's more coming," said Peter, with a look at the empty can.

"Unfortunately," continued Hans, "your plans with both of us failed. You did not know that Peter has as many friends in Amsterdam as you have in Rome, and that his

jailer happened to be his own cousin. No more did you know that I have got friends here in Brill, who would help me against all the soldiers and spies which you had put out to catch me when I was sent away. So, though you had not bargained for it, I got out of Brill, and Peter out of prison. And we two set to work to find you out."

"And we have done it, too, Hans, my boy," chuckled Blink, rubbing his hands.

"Now, Yonker," continued Hans, changing his tone from one of bitter mockery to one of earnestness and energy, "just listen to what we have discovered, and after that keep him as your friend and dismiss me if you like. I have discovered that this holy man, after Mistress Agnes and I were caught in the Broodhuys, had a long conversation with the *visitor* of the Inquisition, for both of them belong to the well-known order of Jesus, or, as it should be called, of the devil. Gritta, who is by no means such a fool when she talks to *me*, saw both of them through the keyhole of the kitchen door.

Galama gave a start, when looking up he saw the Jesuit turn pale once more, and cast an anxious look about him. He endeavored to speak, but emotions choked his throat, and the only thing he could do was to feel for his sword that stood against the wall.

"Sit down, Yonker," growled Peter Blink, pressing him into his chair; "there's more coming yet. Bless ye, we have only begun."

"Then we have found out that this reverend gentleman, whose name, by the bye, is Father Sextus," continued Hans, keeping his eyes fixed on the Jesuit, who evidently had great difficulty in keeping calm under the slow and measured tones of Hans's accusation, "had the best reasons for thinking that there was *no cavalry coming*, inasmuch as he mounted a horse and returned home with the officer when all the fallen Beggars had been despatched. That is the man, Yonker, who lingered and dawdled and prolonged every action until we should all be caught in the trap. When I heard the cavalry coming on, I watched him, and I heard him say 'At last!' Do you remember *that*, Father?"

And Hans stretched forth his neck and peered at the Jesuit.

"I deny your accusations," said the latter, with a voice trembling with rage; "they are base, lying calumnies; and were I master here instead of guest, I would bury this dagger in your lying throat."

"Oh, we will have a turn at that presently," said Hans, with a sneer. "Only you will have many things to atone for; such as the skipper, who risked his life for the Yonker, and poor Gritta herself, who, I suppose, will be hanged by this time too.

Karel flew up with every passion expressed upon his face; but, happily for the Jesuit, Blink once more pressed him down.

"Do not spoil the game, Yonker," he said; "there is plenty more coming."

"Well, Hans, for God's sake, make it short!" gasped Karel. "If all you say be true, he is already guilty enough. Take him away, and do with him what you think proper. And may God have mercy upon him."

"Ah, but hear the rest first, Yonker," said Hans. "I have found out that he had a hand in the disappearance of Mistress—"

"What!" gasped Galama, nearly choking, and struggling under the grasp of Peter Blink, who held him in his chair. "He—"

He fell back overpowered by his passion, and looked tremblingly and with flaming eyes at the Jesuit, on whose face the scowl of defiance and the look of guilt were enough to confirm what Hans had said.

"That is the holy father," cried Hans, "that is the follower of Jesus, who brought Mistress Maria hither to suit his purpose, and who, when he saw that she was likely to be troublesome, removed her and sweet Mistress Agnes, God knows where. Say, villain, if you do yet hope for a morsel of grace from my hands, the hands of Hans, who never spared an enemy yet, say, speak! where are they? I know they were taken away by your orders. Where—?"

A roar rang through the room. Karel, bursting his bonds, flew out of his chair when the whole truth stood before him. He seemed to crouch so as to take a better leap upon his enemy. But the Jesuit was before

him. While he sat there, he had calmly calculated his chances. Quick as lightning he put his foot between Hans's legs, and made him tumble on the floor. Then seizing the light, and dashing it in the Yonker's face, he turned round.

"They are out of your power, at any rate," he cried.

All was darkness and confusion in the room. Hans scrambled to the door, and roared out, "Seize him!" He was met by the Beggar who had kept watch outside the door with drawn sword, and who swore that no one had passed him.

At that moment a faint cry was heard. Then a window was opened, and a sound as if some one jumped from a height on the earth fell upon their ears.

"He's in the next room!" "He's gone!" "Seize him below!" "Break open the door!" were the first ejaculations heard.

"Silence! I have the lamp. Light it," sounded Blink's monosyllables through them all.

All were silent till the lamp was lighted and showed the state of the apartment. Hans was standing near the door at which they had entered, Peter Blink stood near the table, and Karel was lying under it on the ground. In a moment he was on his feet, and cried, "Where is he?"

"He's gone into this room, and shut both doors," said Hans, pointing to the door which communicated with the baroness's bedroom.

"My mother," shrieked Karel, putting his hand to his forehead.

He rushed to the door, and tried to open it; but the firm bolt withstood his effort, and he wrung his hands in despair.

"Get out," said Blink, pushing him away.

He lifted his leg, gave the door a tremendous kick near the bolt, and made it fly open. All entered the apartment, and Karel, rushing forward, threw himself impetuously upon the form of his mother, which lay in a half-kneeling position before the little crucifix.

"Mother! mother! he has killed her! Great God! mother!" he moaned.

"Karel, my son!" lisped the baroness,

opening her eyes feebly. "He has fled through the window! What is it?"

"Yonker," said Peter Blink, tapping him on the shoulder, "must flee at once. Take your leave. Hans, let us prepare things."

They withdrew, and left the all but unconscious widow alone with her son. To describe the scene which took place between them, when in short words he told her what had happened, and that he must go, is altogether out of my power. Nor was it much of a scene, so far as action and outward appearance go. For the most part, Galama remained clasped to that faithful breast which had nourished and sheltered him so often while he was young, and which he must leave forever. When in short accents he told her of Block's treachery, and that it was he who had taken the two girls away, she was overcome by grief. She had confided in him so thoroughly, and he had made himself so agreeable and so meritorious, that she felt his treachery all the deeper. She said not a word. Her tears refused to flow, and she stared at the floor as if she had lost all thought, all power of action. Karel witnessed her condition; his heart was well-nigh breaking. He knelt down before her, and taking her hands in his, breathed a fervent prayer to Him who alone was able to comfort her. Then, realizing all the danger of his position, and knowing that he could do no good by staying, he tore himself away.

Hans and Peter had meanwhile been occupied with the preparations.

"You had better go downstairs, Peter, and catch up whatever arms you think the Yonker can use," said Hans. "His pistols are in the kitchen, above the chimney; that is where I hung them. I shall get his things here."

Blink went downstairs, and Hans, going to the large cabinet, began to lay out a few articles of clothing, and all the money and valuables he could find.

"Are you ready, Hans?" said the voice of Galama, behind him; "at least, that is, if you will forgive me for the injury I have done you, and follow me once more through the

wide, wide world. I shall be quite alone now, you know."

Hans turned round, and flinging himself on his knees before his master, he seized his hand and kissed it. Big tears rolled down his cheeks; and pointing to the door of the little room, he sobbed, "I promised her to take care of you, twenty years ago, Yonker, and God knows that I have tried to do it. But I have been the cause of all this."

"Get up, old friend," said Galama, with a trembling voice. "We shall not part again; but let us flee from here, and consider in a safer place what's to be done! You are not guilty, at any rate."

In a moment they had taken up what was worth taking, and descended the stairs. At the foot they were met by Blink, who carried a couple of pistols, a large battle-axe, and an immense two-handed sword, both of which had belonged to Galama's ancestors, and were kept in the family as relics. Galama smiled when he saw the armament, but Blink said:

"Never mind, Yonker. You take pistols, Hans sword. I'll keep th' axe;" and with these monosyllables he distributed the articles.

"Which way best?" he then asked, looking at both men.

"The Water Gate is worst," said Hans; "Sextus has warned them there, and he has probably gone along to the Long Gate next. So for the Quay Gate, I think. They will be here presently."

This counsel was generally admitted to be the best, and presently the men issued from the house, each with a pistol in one hand and his sword in the other, Peter Blink shouldering the axe with perfect grace.

As has been said before, the house of the baroness stood on the canal called the Maerlandt, at an angle of fifty degrees from which another canal, called the Quay, ran round the east side of the town, and flowed into the fosse around the bastions and fortifications close to the south gate. From the middle of the Quay a path through some out-gardens led straight on to the Quay Gate, which was seldom used, and except in time of war slenderly watched. To this gate the five Beggars ran.

It seemed, however, as if their presence in the city had become known. From the neighboring watch-house of the Water Gate a shout went up when they were seen to cross the narrow wooden bridge which led to the other side of the canal. Some shots fell, but fell harmlessly, and then half a dozen soldiers set off in pursuit.

"They shall not catch us this way," said Hans, who closed up the rear, and setting his sword into the wood, he gave a vigorous push, and sent the bridge, which turned upon a pivot at the other end, almost over to the opposite side.

"Come on," he said; "Koppestock is waiting for us with his boat. We shall have the whole town behind us presently."

On they fled, up the ramparts, their feet crushing the grit beneath them. In a few moments they had reached the Quay Gate, the guard of which, consisting of about half a dozen men, alarmed by the noise of their steps, had come out of the house, not knowing what was coming. The gate itself was built on the bastion, which lay like a little three-cornered island in the fosse; a wooden bridge connected it with the city on the one side, and the country round about on the other. Before they knew by whom they were attacked, the Beggars were upon them, Blink in advance. With a desperate flourish of his axe he broke the line of the enemy, and sent one of them to the ground. Without pausing to renew his attack he fled to the gate, which was left unattended, and the tremendous blows of his axe fell like hail upon the iron lock. It soon gave way, and he stepped outside. But there a second work awaited him. The drawbridge was pulled up, and the chains were fastened by another lock. A shout arose behind him. He looked round and saw the four Beggars running towards the open gate, while at the bridge-head there appeared the numerous helmets of their pursuers.

"Here, Hans, cut down these two locks, and leave the rest to me," he said. Hans fled through the little door, and the axe was soon heard upon the locks.

"I'll get them," chuckled Blink to him-

self: "pepper and salt, that's the thing for them."

He quietly allowed the three other Beggars to go through the door in the gate. Then, opening the little square hole which was cut out in it for the sentry to speak through, he stepped outside too, and closed the door behind him. Then, seizing his pistol, he held it through the hole, and throwing some powder on the pan, he aimed and fired.

The foremost amongst the soldiers, who had just come to the end of the bridge, staggered and fell. His comrades gave a yell, and fell back, not having expected such a reception.

"Come on, ye cowards," cried the voice of the Jesuit. "Seize these men, and your reward shall be heaven."

Hardly had he said these words, when a second shot sent him on his back. At the same moment the bridge fell down with a crash, the chains ringing and clanking heavily.

"*Vivent les Gueux!*" shouted Blink; and firing a third pistol into the midst of them without aiming, he followed his comrades over the bridge.

The soldiers ran outside the ramparts, but in vain. In the deep darkness nothing could be descried, and even the most experienced ear could not distinguish a sound.

About half an hour afterwards a boat with six men was rowing across the Meuse.

"You and the axe did for the officer," said Hans to Peter; "but I think I must have

killed all the rest; for that immense sword gives one the swing of half a dozen others. Are you not afraid to row us across, John?" he continued, addressing the ferryman.

"I row everybody, Hans, and I will row old Nick when he comes," answered the oarsman, "only do not talk so loud, or they might hear us. Not that I am afraid, but may be you are."

"Well, Yonker, I do not suppose you have any objections to becoming a sailor for some time," said Hans, turning to the unfortunate nobleman who sat by his side, silent and in deep thought. "You are nowhere so free as on the sea, and as long as that Jesuit is alive you will have no rest."

"Whose ship is it to which you intend to take me?" asked Galama, curtly.

"Sonoy's, if you like, until you have taken one for yourself," answered Hans.

Galama nodded assent. "Take me anywhere," he said, in a listless tone. "I say farewell to my native land, for I have lost everything—everything." And he bowed his head upon his chest.

"I say, Hans, you are coming back some day, are you not?" said the rower to his friend.

"Oh, yes," said Hans; "we shall come back soon, and take the town."

"Right," said the other, pulling at his oars; "then I shall help you."

But neither of them, as both smiled at the boast, knew how soon it was to be fulfilled.

CHAPTER XXII.

BEGGARS' ETHICS.

THREE years and a half had elapsed since the above events took place, when a small frigate was making her way under full canvas towards the southern coast of Britain, apparently coming from the coast of Holland. It was towards the close of March, 1572. The sharp and cold north wind, carrying along with it an occasional shower of sleet, swelled the sails to their full extent, and made the vessel shoot through the water. It was a fine though not a very large ship, carrying some twenty guns, and to judge by the rigging and accoutrement, was one of the privateers of which in those days every sea was full. The biting cold and the hard work which they had undergone, had sent the crew below; for, with the exception of the man at the helm and the necessary hands, the deck was clear. A young man, some five-and-twenty years old, whose dress, half-soldier, half-sailor, revealed the rank of officer, was pacing up and down, his hands hid in the pockets of his cloak, and his felt hat pulled over his eyes. He cast an occasional glance at the sails and at the course of the vessel, and giving a few directions to the man at the helm, pursued his walk.

It would be difficult to recognize in the stout and robust frame, the long beard, and the browned features of the officer, the lithe figure, and the youthful appearance of our hero, Karel Galama. But three years and a half of seafaring life had strengthened his already powerful limbs, and the influence of weather and sun had tanned the almost womanish fairness of his skin. Not to his disadvantage, however, for if formerly he looked an enthusiastic youth, he now appeared as the calm, considerate, and thinking man. His features had lost none of their commanding expression, his eyes none of their haughtiness, but a deep sorrow, a hidden

pain, was silently gnawing at the soul of which that face and those eyes were but the mirrors. It was afternoon, and the sun, which through the day had appeared by fits and starts, prepared to take his leave, with all the beauty over which he had command. The Yonker looked at the beautiful spectacle in silence, and with his arms folded on his chest he muttered:

"How many times shall I see this sun rise and set again before I go to that place of rest, where there shall be no weeping and no sorrow?"

"It will not last much longer, Yonker," said a voice beside him, which we recognize as belonging to Hans, "if this kind of life is to keep on. For upon my Beggar's oath we have not provision for more than two days, and what even that is you may judge by this specimen."

And Hans, who was sitting astride a gun, with one hand held up the half of a raw her-ring of a very small kind. He had a piece of dry bread in the other.

"It is your own fault, Hans," answered the Yonker; "why did you not bring back some more provisions from the people at Wieringen? You might have filled half the ship, had you not shown the white feather to a parcel of boors."

"Boors!" cried Hans. "May be they are, but they have their own way of fighting, which is certainly not a bad one; for you know as well as I do, that eighteen of us were killed in the last scramble, and I was as near being one of them as anything. For Tom, poor fellow, and I were both lugging away at an immense pig. It was a tremendous beast, and it kicked at such a rate that I, who unfortunately had hold of the hind legs, was all of a sudden thrown on my back. 'Hold on, Tom!' cried I. But poor Tom was worse off than I; for at that moment the owner of

the animal came up with a tremendous pitchfork, and was just going to let me feel its prongs when I fell, and crash went the fork right into the pig's hams. The animal gave one squeak, and down went Tom under the pig, and before I could get up, the farmer had despatched him. That cured me, I can assure you, and I made myself scarce; for I saw a great many pitchforks coming along, and I could not very well guard myself against them."

"I hope some of the other ships at Dover will be able to give us something," said Galama, who had not listened to Hans's story; "else I really do not know what to do. What do the men below say?"

"They do not care so long as they have something to eat and drink; but when that is done, they will turn upon us," answered Hans. "They are in a rage already, because we did not take some of the fishing-smacks that passed us."

"Fools," said Galama. "A house divided against itself cannot stand. They would have us war against the whole world, and make our friends as much afraid of us as our bitterest enemies. How little do they understand what they are fighting for!"

"And how little do they follow that religion which they profess to defend!" said a voice behind them.

"Ay, Master Barends," said Galama, turning round to the speaker with cordiality, "it is perhaps for that very reason that our cause prospers so little."

It was indeed the preacher whom we last saw in Van Alphen's barn at Brill. He had fallen in with Galama, in a rather peculiar and certainly providential manner. When Galama fled out of Brill with Hans, Blink, and the other Beggars, he had taken himself to Diedrich Sonoy, who was at that time the admiral of the Beggars of the Sea. After having been in his ship for some time, he found an opportunity at last of rigging out one of the captured ships for his own use, and having found a good crew, he commenced life as a commander of a little privateer carrying six guns. His spirit at that time being still agitated by what had happened, he

could not bear the slow routine of cruising about in the rear of the fleet, and he obtained leave to cruise on his own account. And now he began a life of audacity, such as he could only have consented to lead in his present state of mind. It seemed as if all the good impressions of Agnes's conversation had left him; as if, driven to despair by the calamities which overtook him (for on a foray to Brill he learned that, half a year after he fled out of it, his mother died of a broken heart), he had cast away all those good intentions which he had made upon his sick-bed, and which he had often repeated in his prayers. A day seldom went by without some fierce fighting. Either he crept at night into a harbor, and suddenly attacked the unconscious Spanish merchantman that happened to have cast her anchor there, or landing his men near some small town, which was known to be wholly Spanish, and making a sudden foray, leave the people terrified and astonished at his boldness.

Upon one of these expeditions, as he was one evening marching at the head of his men along a dyke, he became aware of the form of a man lying across it. A light having been produced, it appeared to be that of a middle-aged man, who was bleeding from a wound in the head, and who probably in consequence of it had lost his consciousness. Karel dimly recollected the face, as that of a preacher in Brussels, and commanded his men to lift the wounded man and carry him back to the ship. By a great deal of attention the preacher was at last restored to life and to health, and it gradually came out in his conversations with Galama, that he knew the two girls, and could give the anxious youth more information about their imprisonment than any one else. And gradually, as the pious man spoke words of comfort and of divine love to the Yonker, all the afflicted youth's old feelings revived, his former intentions came back to him with renewed strength, and he now resolved not to let them depart again.

It is true, he remained in his ship, and he prayed Barends to remain also, which the latter gladly consented to, first, because he saw that he could do a great deal of good among

the crew, and, secondly, because at that time the Netherlands were getting too hot for him, he having three times escaped death by a hair's-breadth. Consequently both remained, but Galama stopped his career of plunder, and once more attached himself to the fleet. Shortly afterwards Treslong begged him and Barends to come over to his ship, he having lost his lieutenant, and thus we find them here together. They were both liked by the crew; Galama for his skill and his bravery, without which they would never have listened to the words of reproof which he sometimes gave them; and Barends for his warm-heartedness, his readiness to help, and above all for his skill in medicine, which he had picked up in his eventful life, and by means of which he often gained access to an otherwise hardened heart.

"I cannot but deplore the fact," continued Barends, "that with all their courage and bravery, they are little if at all better than those against whom they fight. Almost the only difference lies in the name."

"Well, Master Barends," said Hans, respectfully, looking at his little fish, "you see many of us have gone through what others have not, and I know there is not one on board this vessel who has not a clear understanding that he is fighting against those who ignore our liberties, who rob us of our hard-earned money, and all that kind of thing. But then, you see, most of us have had some hard injustice, some fearful wrong, which has been done to us by the Spaniards or the priests, and you cannot be astonished if we become half mad when we have them in our clutches. Who cut off Gerri's nose and ears? and who tore out the boatswain's tongue, so that whistling is the only thing he can do now? These are no trifles!"

"Ah, Hans," said Wouter Barends, "I should like to hear you once speak of them with compassion, as erring sheep."

"Erring sheep!" answered Hans, with a fierce expression on his face. "They are tigers, Master Barends, blood-thirsty tigers. I do not know what you have experienced, but I can say nothing less of them."

"And still they are more to be pitied than

hated, Hans," said the preacher. "You know I was a priest myself once, and the wife and child which I had after I left them have been killed, and I myself have suffered from them severely."

"I have been one, too," said Hans, his face darkening as he spoke. The two men started, and looked incredulous. "I daresay you do not know it," continued he, "and I do not like speaking about it, because whenever I think of that time my blood begins to boil, though it is twenty years ago now. I was about eighteen then, Yonker. I was a novice in Brussels, when one day my mother, my sister, and my elder brother were seized. The two women were put in prison, but my brother, the finest fellow that ever lived, was first tortured on the rack, and then drowned in a water-butt, because he could not stand on his legs. And what had they done? Nothing, but given Evert Hagel, the preacher, a week's shelter on their farm."

"Evert Hagel!" cried Barends, joyously; "he was my teacher. I have often heard him say that he met with some truly kind people on his tours, who gave him shelter, whatever the danger might be. Pray, was your brother's name Jakob Everink?"

"It was," said Hans, looking up in astonishment. "Why, how do you know it?"

"Because Hagel often told me about it," answered Barends. "Your brother must have been a very godly man, for Hagel always spoke with affection of him."

"So he was," said Hans, gloomily. "He was a good deal better than I am: what did Hagel say about him?"

Barends told what he recollected, and found both in Hans and his master profound listeners.

"Ah," said Hans, when there was a pause, "it made me so desperate that I fled from the priests, and your father, the baron, gave me money to go to Germany, and took me afterwards into his service. And what can I do now but avenge on these priests, these bloodhounds, my brother's, my mother's death?"

"Hans!" said Barends, earnestly, laying his hand on the fellow's shoulder. "Do you know what your brother's last words were?"

'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

At this moment a lad acquainted Galama that Treslong desired to see him, and judging it wisest to leave Hans alone with Barends, he slowly directed his steps to the cabin. He descended the steps, and entered the cabin. It was a small apartment, and a table, a few chairs, a stove, and two or three chests were the only furniture, besides the hammock in which, with one leg trailing on the floor, lay the captain of the vessel, the Lord Blois de Treslong. He had apparently gone to sleep without taking the trouble to undress, for he had a cuirass on, and a sword, a helmet, and a pair of pistols lay on the table as if they had been thrown there hastily and carelessly.

"How is the wind, Yonker?" asked Treslong, lifting up his head, and greeting Galama.

"North, north-east, and plenty of it," was the answer.

"Do you think we shall reach the fleet to-morrow morning?"

"We shall be off Margate Sands some time to-night if all goes as it does now," said Galama. "But are you sure they have not sailed?"

"If they have, we shall be in a nice pickle," said Treslong, sitting upright in his hammock; "for where are we to get ammunition and victuals? But I see no reason why they should have sailed, unless a whole Spanish squadron came upon them, and then they would not have made off without giving battle."

"It is not so unlikely as you think, my lord," answered Galama; "for you know that lately Queen Elizabeth has turned rather crusty towards us Beggars. I fancy that she sees she can get more benefit out of the duke and the king than out of the prince and his allies, and judging from a purely political point of view only, there is little doubt that she can gain but little by protecting the despised Sea Beggars, with their twenty or thirty ships, against the whole of the Spanish nation and navy, which would give her trouble enough."

"Trouble be hanged!" said Treslong, jumping from his hammock and undoing his

cuirass; "what harm does it do Queen Elizabeth to have our little fleet lying off Dover or running into the Thames? We surely do not harm any of her vessels, and we pay for what we get like honest men; and I do not know that Sir William Cecil is in any way against us. Moreover, at the end of last month, Alva and the queen were at loggerheads; but this confounded ice has kept us so out of all news, that they may be friends now for all I know."

"But even if they were no friends," answered Galama, "I am very much afraid that the latent protection which she has given us as yet will not be of very long duration. Think you, my lord, King Philip will allow her to give shelter to his most desperate enemies without remonstrating with her, and, it may be, threatening her? We do her no harm, it is true; but Queen Bess is by far too acute to risk a war with mighty Spain for the sake of us, who are Beggars indeed, and yield her not a farthing of profit."

"And do not *we* risk a war with that mighty Spain?" said Treslong, beating on a silver bell on the table. "Are we then forever to be everybody's enemy? What a noble thing it would be for the great Queen of England to take our part! She is Protestant, and she herself has suffered from persecution, as I have been told. But I dare say she is no better than that filthy Count of Embden, who, though he is a Protestant, maltreated me nevertheless."

"Well, you paid *him* out with his own coin, my lord," said the Yonker, smiling. "So you have nothing to complain of there."

"Ay!" said Treslong, smiling over the cup of wine which his page had brought him. "I have not received his summons yet, but some day methinks I shall go and ask for it through my metal mouths. But no," he added, emptying the cup, and handing it, filled, over to Galama; "he may be what he likes, but he treated me hospitably, and but for that fool of a Roobol we might be friends yet."

After some talk about matters which will not interest our readers, he continued:

"I have had enough rest now, so you can turn in, and I shall wake you when we get in

sight of the fleet or the clear coast. No objections, Yonker. Orders must be obeyed. You look weary and troubled. Oh, I know you will deny that, but I can judge of your looks better than you can. Turn in, sir, and be neat and trim by the time we get to Lumei's, and do not let us look like starved sheep."

The Yonker knew that it was of little use resisting his captain, so he went to his own cabin and got into his hammock, where, despite his assertion to the effect that he was not in the least fatigued, he was soon in a sound sleep. Treslong put the pistols in his belt, and the sword, with its beautifully embroidered leathern scabbard and scarf, over his shoulder, and stepped on deck. The gray evening was well-nigh changed into a clear and starry night.

To explain to the reader the allusion which Galama and Treslong made about the Count of Embden, we will shortly relate the curious change of fortunes which Treslong had undergone since we left him after the unsuccessful affairs in the forest of Brussels.

He reached Count Louis' army in safety, where he was heartily welcomed; for his skill and his courage were alike highly valued. After the terrible defeat of Jemmingen he succeeded, with Count Louis and a few others, in swimming across the Ems; but on reaching the town of Embden he became severely ill in consequence of the very dangerous wounds he had received in the battle, while fighting at the head of a company of horse. His strong constitution, however, enabled him to recover, and he was preparing to take the field again, when his lieutenant and confidant, Roobol, had the stupidity to levy black-mail from a citizen of Amsterdam, who was staying in the town. Such things, it is true, were not of rare occurrence; but the Count of Embden, wishing to remain on good terms with the opulent city, caused both Treslong and his lieutenant to be imprisoned. For two long years did the impatient noble pass his time in the small town, begging that his case might be heard, and judgment delivered. Probably, as the count

was in secret understanding with Alva, he had determined to keep him a prisoner till he could conveniently hand him over to the duke. They were at last, however, allowed to go at large, upon promising not to leave the territory and to appear whenever they were summoned.

Of this Treslong took advantage. He procured from the prince letters of marque, as captain of a privateer for two vessels, manned them secretly, and sailed away one bright evening, maintaining that he was still on the count's territory, by which he meant the water, and leaving behind a promise that he would appear whenever he was called upon. On the cruises which he now undertook he fell in with Galama, who knew more about seafaring, and was very glad to share with his friend and former guardian the command of one of the largest, if not the largest, ship of the little fleet. In the beginning of the year they were compelled by frost to take shelter under the island of Wieringen, at the mouth of the Zuyder Zee; but were soon prevented from moving by being frozen in. Making the best of his situation, Treslong sent detachments of his men out on foraging expeditions, which however proved fatal at times, especially the last one, upon which eighteen men lost their lives, and Treslong was made to promise on oath to stop his crew from plundering the neighborhood.

As if his position were not awkward enough, the Spaniards, hearing of his presence, sent a troop of soldiers over the ice to capture him. His broadsides, however, answered the Spaniards so well that they were beaten back, and before the attack could be renewed the united efforts of the whole crew succeeded in getting the ship out of the ice, when, having received intelligence that the fleet of the Beggars was lying off Dover, he sailed thither, as we find him now. His lieutenant, Roobol, had, in the meantime, sailed away with the other ship; and thus, badly manned, with little provision, and less ammunition, they were glad to steer for a place where they could supply their wants and meet with a friendly reception.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A HOPELESS PROSPECT.

THE gray light in the east had scarcely announced the break of day, and the fresh morning breeze was still dispersing the mist which hung over the water, when the Yonker, refreshed by his sleep; of which he had lately enjoyed but little, turned out of his cabin and stepped upon deck. He paused for a moment at the sight which met his eyes. The rays of the rising sun, playing upon the water, which was now almost perfectly calm, revealed at some distance the white cliffs of the English coast. A few small fishing-boats were rowing towards or away from the land, and the fishers called to each other in hearty accents. To the right of him the water stretched away glittering in the sun, and heaving under the broad swell of the Atlantic. To the left, and as far as his eye could reach, he saw a fleet of some twenty vessels, most of them of a small size, and none larger than the ship on board which he was. It was the fleet of the Beggars of the Sea, the terror of Spanish merchantmen, and the continual object of suspicion and anxiety to both France and England. Turning his eyes to his own ship, he discovered that she was riding at her anchor with all sails reefed. A part of the crew was busy in preparing the long-boat, and it was evident that some one was leaving the ship. At this moment, Treslong came up to him, and said, in a tone of astonishment :

"What, Yonker, not ready yet? Make haste. We are going to the admiral."

"I would rather be excused," said Galama.

"I can do no good there. You know very well that, upon almost all points, my opinions run exactly contrary to those of Count Lumei de la Marck, and, consequently, there is not much love lost between us."

"Well," said Treslong, "that may be, but that is no reason why you should not go and

pay him your respects. My opinion is, in many cases, directly opposite to his; but still he is a daring and clever admiral, and I shall always admire him."

"His courage springs from a wrong source, my lord," said Karel. "You see those men that are working yonder; any one of them, if he had been born a count and educated, could do what the admiral does. He fights, not to liberate our countrymen from the galling yoke of popish tyranny, but solely and alone for the sake of plunder, excitement, and revenge. I detest alike his principles and his bloody practices, and if you insist upon my accompanying you, I promise you beforehand that I shall raise my voice decidedly and loudly against your plan; for if the poor inhabitants of Enkhuizen are left to his mercy, they will henceforth detest and hate the Sea Beggars and the Prince of Orange, under whose banner they commit their deeds."

"You look at things in too dark a light, Yonker," answered Treslong. "It is possible that De la Marck is too much of a free-booter and too little of a patriot for our taste. But there is no doubt about it that he has done a good deal of damage to our enemies. And he is surely not the only man of influence in the fleet. There is De Ryk, and Brandt, and Van Haren; and if they support me in remonstrating with him on his ferocity, he will not dare to persist. He knows me, and fears me, for I could deprive him of his command by one word to the prince. Come along, Yonker. We shall be able to do something for the liberty of our country yet;" and he slapped him confidentially on the shoulder.

But Galama's gloomy ideas were not so easily dispelled. He shook his head, and said :

"Not unless you command me, my lord. I am almost afraid that the time has hopelessly gone by when anything short of a miracle can do aught for our country. The state of affairs has grown worse and worse, and the people have no spirit left in them to resist even the most dastardly deeds of Alva."

Treslong turned away. He seemed to be desirous of shaking off that same feeling which possessed Galama, and which he felt creeping over him. He stepped towards the middle of the ship, saying in a light tone, as if he treated the other's words as mere fancies :

"Well, just as you like, Yonker. I shall not command you, but at any rate I shall take Hans with me. He is an intelligent fellow, and can come back with orders and ammunition. So farewell for the present ;" and in a few minutes the long-boat conveyed him and Hans to the admiral's ship, which could be distinguished in the distance.

There was reason for the gloomy view which Galama took of the state of affairs in the provinces. In the years in which he had been engaged in cruising and capturing ships, the state of the country had become worse and worse, and even the most sanguine were beginning to lose all hope of an eventual change. It was not long after the defeat of Count Louis, that the Prince of Orange determined to take the field himself. His brother had offered battle to Alva, in direct opposition to his wishes, his position being at that time anything but hopeful ; but far from being discouraged by the disaster, it seemed to give him new energy. His estates and revenues in Holland had been confiscated. His German property and his household plate and valuables were all he possessed. Living in a foreign country, and compelled to be a guest of one or another of the German sovereigns, his endeavors were put forth under their tolerance. The heavier the yoke of tyranny began to rest on his countrymen, the more zealous did the prince become in agitating in favor of them, but the less became the sympathy he met with. Almost every one advised him to sit still, some forbade him their territory, many refused him

a loan of money, and all condemned his patriotic endeavors as foolish and Quixotic.

"But, with God's help," said the prince, "I can do without them." He pawned his plate, his valuables, his very clothes. He collected money from far and near. He issued, as sovereign of the provinces, letters of marque to the Beggars of the Sea, who brought him many a good prize. Meanwhile the Emperor of Germany openly forbade him to levy troops in his dominions. The prince answered as openly in a "justification," in which he told the whole world his principles and the reasons of his actions, at the same time declaring war against Alva as an enemy to the liberties and the people of Holland, and a traitor to their lawful governor, the King of Spain. Within three months of his brother's defeat he crossed the Rhine in a masterly manner, at the head of thirty thousand troops.

The whole country was then on its knees, praying, weeping, trembling with anxiety. Should the prince succeed in defeating Alva's troops, the people were ready to rise and throw off the hated yoke forever. But it was not to be ; Alva, imitating the example of the Roman general, Fabius, followed the prince like a phantom, skirmishing, dodging, robbing him of his provisions, retreating as soon as a battle was likely to come on, and leaving his enemy frantic with rage and impotence. The prince's general, Count Hoogstraten, and his whole rear-guard, consisting of three thousand men, were butchered. At the end of little more than a month the prince had to disband his troops, without being able to give them as much as a month's pay. He and his brothers fled to France ; and the Duke of Alva made a triumphant march back to the capital, and in remembrance of his bloodless victory erected a famous statue in honor of himself in the citadel of Antwerp.

Another faint streak of hope appeared on the horizon, but died gradually away. Alva involved himself in a scheme to murder Queen Elizabeth and to put Mary Stuart on the throne of England. Elizabeth threatened, Alva receded, and by degrees the mat-

ter was settled. Meanwhile, Alva resolved upon a new measure wherewith to extinguish the last spark of resistance that might have been left in the hearts of the Dutch people. He convoked the States-General, and coolly informed them that he had resolved to impose three ~~taxes~~ upon the provinces. The first was a tax of one per cent. upon all property whatsoever, to be paid once for all. The second, one of five per cent., was imposed upon every transfer of real estate, such as landed property, etc. And, thirdly, a tax of ten per cent. was laid upon every single article of merchandise, or anything that was sold, to be paid *as often as it was sold*. In other words, an article being sold ten times would have to pay its whole price in taxes.

The States-General, who saw that these taxes, and especially the two last, would do away with all trade, immediately and firmly, at the risk of their heads, refused. To make the discussion shorter they granted the tax of one per cent., and then settled themselves with a resolute air to resistance. Even Viglius, the duke's greatest helper, openly denounced the taxes, and voted against them. The duke was mad. He raged, he stormed; he swore that he would hang every man, that he would sell the whole country; he threatened, he begged. Overcome by his terrible threats, the states, without army and without defence, one by one reluctantly delivered their last bulwark against tyranny into his hands, upon one condition, that all the provinces should agree to pay the tax. All did, except one. The province of Utrecht held out, and it was heavily visited. One of the most mutinous, brutal, and ill-paid regiments of the duke's army was quartered in the capital. Violence of every imaginable kind was of daily occurrence, but still the city would not give in. It was then summoned before the Blood Council, and after some delay judgment was pronounced. Every law, charter, privilege, freedom, and custom of which it had become possessed during many ages, was declared null and void. Every pennyworth of property of any kind was confiscated and seized. All tolls, rents, taxes, imports, were appropriated. Thousands were ruined

and brought to beggary, and the whole province looked as if it had been visited by the plague. A deputation to the king returned from Spain with no result, and its members were glad that they had at least returned alive.

The other states, trembling at this example, were glad to make a compromise by which the levying of the taxes was to be deferred for two years. There was a little relief, but it did not last long. An amnesty had long been promised. At last it arrived, and proved to be a complete mockery. No one who had ever done anything contrary to Alva's orders was included, and even those suspected were not to be forgiven. The Inquisition and the Blood Council set to work with renewed vigor, and the amnesty was ushered in with a fresh onslaught of burning, hanging, and beheading.

At the same time a fearful inundation swept over Holland, by which thousands of people found a watery grave. It was as if everything combined to make the descendants of the old Batavians, upon their little streak of marsh, as miserable as possible. In 1571, the year in which the taxes were to be collected, the controversy became as hot as ever, and the resistance almost as determined. Both parties were furious, the more so, because it was now not merely a matter of religion. Everybody felt himself directly attacked; everybody, whether Roman Catholic, Calvinist, Anabaptist, or Lutheran, joined in opposing what was threatened. But the Duke of Alva was exactly the man to persist where such resistance was made. He protested that he had collected heavier taxes than these from his own people in Spain, and he swore that he would deal harder with them yet, if the rich burghers of the provinces refused to do what the poor people in Spain had done. The rich people were silent. The shops were shut. The bakers, the butchers, the coal merchants, declined to do business. The ships rotted in the havens; the cattle could hardly be sold. The people passed each other in silence, and wondered how long this was to last.

The Prince of Orange, never despairing,

was in France with his brother. He had succeeded in at last paying the claims of his former army, and was collecting money for a new one. But it seemed that there was now but little courage left in the country. The year had gone by, and the new one entered with the same gloomy, deathlike silence reigning over the provinces. Alva himself felt the effect of this total stagnation of business, and resolved to put an end to it. He ordered the tenth-penny to be collected in Brabant, and really succeeded by violence in gathering part of it. But he could not open the shops, and force the people to buy and sell. He could not dispel from their faces that fixed look of sorrow and gloom, as if the whole country had been stricken with a terrible plague.

According to his usual practice, he determined to make an example. He commanded the shops in Brussels to be opened, or he would hang every shopkeeper on the post of his own door, as an example to be followed throughout all the land. The shops remained shut, and the whole country looked and waited with suspended breath to see what would be the result.

Such was the condition of the Netherlands when Treslong's ship arrived off the coast of Dover. Galama, who had lost almost everything which tied him to the land, but whose patriotic disposition made him feel the state of his country very deeply, resolved to remain on board rather than mix with the captains of the fleet, most of whom, though they belonged to good families, were somewhat dissipated, and appeared in a mood of joviality and carelessness, which he knew would grate upon his own feelings. Again, he knew that Treslong was going to advise the admiral to undertake an expedition to Enkhuizen, a wealthy town on the west coast of the Zuyder Zee, where there was at the time but a small garrison and many adherents of the prince. Galama, however, feared that the expedition would do their cause more harm than good, as the ferocity and piratical disposition of Lumei would not stop short at taking possession of the town, but would pillage friend and foe alike.

He was nowise sorry, therefore, when the day went by without receiving a visit from any of the captains, though he was rather astonished that Hans did not return. The weather was chilly and wet, the wind shifting almost every moment. As he sat in the cabin by the stove, he already congratulated himself upon the failure of Treslong's plan, when towards evening the door of his cabin opened, and Hans appeared, as usual, grinning from ear to ear.

"Here is a nice kettle of fish on for us, Yonker," he said, shaking his head; "just you read this, and I will tell you all about it afterwards."

And Hans handed his master a paper sealed with wax. Galama hastily broke the seal. It was in Treslong's handwriting, and ran thus:

"ADMIRAL'S SHIP,

"The Thirtieth of Spring month, 1572.

"We are to sail immediately for Enkhuizen. You and Roobol, who is here with his ship, are to lead the van. We have had a sharp discussion; De la Marck has promised to commit no outrages. Make everything ready, and if I am not with you within two hours, start. Make sure to let no vessel pass either way without taking it or warning us. If I am not with you, after you have doubled the Helder, wait for me or orders.

"WILLIAM BLOIS DE TRESLONG."

A shade of deep displeasure passed over Galama's face as he read the order. "Have you brought plenty of ammunition and provision?" he said, turning to Hans.

"Not a morsel of either," was the answer. "You never saw such a mess as there is in the fleet. Nobody has got anything to eat or drink; and the best of it is, that Queen Elizabeth has sent the admiral a notice that he must forthwith leave her coasts, or remain at his peril, while she has forbidden any of her subjects to sell us a groat's-worth of provision or ammunition. Here are real Beggars for you. I hope we may get something nice and hot at Enkhuizen, or else I shall stew my little dog and eat him."

"But have not the other captains—has not Roobol something he can give or lend us till we get what we want?" asked the Yonker.

"I asked Roobol, and he said he had been feeding that day upon nothing but raw her-ring and biscuit," answered Hans; "and you may judge of the scarcity amongst them, when I tell you that the officers who were holding a council of war in Count Lumel's cabin were drinking gin and water instead of wine."

Galama smiled, for it was a ludicrous idea that such men should ever come to what was then reckoned a great extremity. He poured out a cup of wine, and gave it to Hans, who tossed it off with apparent pleasure.

"But how could you see that?" asked Galama. "You were not in the council?"

"Of course I was, Yonker, what do you think?" answered Hans, as if his dignity had been offended. "And I made a speech, too. There was a very sharp discussion about plundering and sacking, and the count swore he would rob all the churches in the town; but my Lord Treslong and I settled him, I can tell you." And he stroked his beard with an air of superiority.

"Curious thing," said Galama, as he mounted the deck; "the count is so very particular about grades and rank, that I do not believe he would have allowed you to sit at the council table. All hands on deck! What did he say?"

"Well," said Hans, "you know, Yonker, I did not exactly *sit* at the table, but I was in the cabin, you know, for giving advice, and that kind of thing. And as I knew what my lord's opinion was, I expressed the same thing, you know, and gave the count a hint about his swearing."

"Oh!" said Galama, who knew how much to believe, "I see what it was. You were called in to give evidence. Here are the men. Clear the deck!"

The whole crew of the ship, not more than thirty men altogether, were by this time assembled on the deck of the vessel, which was

in some confusion, owing to the slackness of work. Quickly the order to clear the deck was executed, and when they had all again assembled round Galama, he said:

"I thought, my men, that we might have been able to give you provisions to-day, but it seems that the whole fleet is in the same condition as we are, and does not possess enough of its own. We have enough yet for some days, and as we are now starting altogether for Enkhuizen to make a foray, I hope you will do your several duties quickly and well. We must start in two hours."

There was deep disappointment in the men's faces as they heard that there was no chance of a present supply of provisions; but when they learned where they were bound for they gave a cheer, for the town was well known as rich and opulent, and even in those times something could be had there. During two hours the crew were busy in preparing again for the voyage. The guns were cleaned, and sails got ready, and swords and daggers, pistols and carbines, were furbished and sharpened.

"I say, Yonker" said Hans, who had been looking at the ammunition, "suppose we fall in with a Spanish man-of-war, what then? We have no more than three balls for each cannon, and precious little powder."

"Well, Hans," answered Galama, complacently, "we must let her come up and board her, if nothing else can be done. Our time is up. My Lord de Treslong, I suppose, will not come. Now for it. Weigh the anchor."

In a few minutes the monotonous clack of the windlass was heard. The wind, which had settled into the west, gently filled the sails, and Galama against his will set out on that memorable journey of which he knew not the end.

"Send two men up aloft, Willem, and let them keep a good look-out for any vessel," commanded Galama, and he went below to take some refreshment.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHIP AHEAD.

"SHIP ahead, Yonker," was the intelligence with which Hans entered Galama's cabin next morning.

"What is she?" inquired Karel, jumping out of bed and hurrying on a few clothes.

"A Spaniard, as far as I can see, and she has perceived us, too, for she is making all sail. She seems to be frightened," was the answer.

Galama fled on deck. It appeared to be, as Hans had said, a Spanish trader.

"All hands make sail," he commanded; and in a few moments, every stitch of canvas having been put on, the fast-sailing vessel flew before the wind.

The crew were eagerly watching what was to follow. They were a singular-looking lot. There was hardly one amongst them who had not some mark on his face or body of the cruel treatment which he had undergone at the hands of the Inquisition. Some were without ears, others without noses, others again had lost their teeth or a hand, or their faces were cut or burned, or their bodies frightfully mangled. They were fantastically dressed, without regard to uniform or order, and presented altogether a ferocious and unsightly spectacle. They were armed to the teeth with formidable axes and swords, with pistols and daggers stuck in their girdles, and they were evidently excited at the idea of a capture.

All of a sudden Hans felt himself pulled by the sleeve.

"Another to port, Hans," said the gruff voice of our old acquaintance, Peter Blink, while he pointed towards a speck on the horizon. Hans looked for some time.

"Is that Roobol's ship close behind us?" asked Galama, looking back and pointing to a third ship behind them.

"Yes. Can we signal?"

Galama was for some moments dubious which ship to prefer; but when he saw Roobol's vessel steering in pursuit of the second trader, he directed all his attention to the one before him. It was clear that they were gaining upon her every moment. She was under a heavy press of canvas, but being heavily laden, and not built for fast sailing, she could not keep ahead of the privateer.

"She is altering her course, Yonker," remarked Hans; "suppose you run right into her. Would not that be a scene! Let them all go to the fishes!"

"Suppose you hold your tongue," said Galama, sternly, directing the course of the ship to be altered so as to follow the trader.

But it seemed that she intended to show fight. Suddenly changing her course again, she was put about and ran back upon her track, passing the privateer at some distance. A flash issued from her deck, a shot fell, and a ball came whizzing through the rigging. The Beggars gave a loud cheer, and flew to the guns, when another ball followed the first, and passed right before her bow.

"Silence!" shouted Galama, stamping on deck; "every one at his post, and not a word. These fellows do not know how to shoot, at any rate," he continued, "so I will give them a lesson."

And stepping to a long gun, he pointed it with some care, and fired. The shot told, for the Spaniard's bowsprit was smashed to atoms.

"Take her mizzen-mast, Yonker," cried Hans, who was all in fervor.

"Better take rudder," growled Blink, who belonged to the gun.

"I think so," said Galama, and aiming again he saw with evident satisfaction that the ball passed just above the rudder, and smashed the gallery of the cabin.

"A little lower this time," muttered Karel to himself, while he saw that the Spaniard was putting on every inch of canvas she could carry.

"They are throwing the cargo overboard," cried Hans, as bale after bale, and barrel after barrel, were thrown out of the trader, and floated on the sea.

"We shall stop that soon enough," said Karel, and fired another gun. The ball struck the rudder just below the water, and the foam splashed up into the cabin window. A cheer went up from the Beggar-crew, and the effect of the shot became immediately apparent. The merchantman veered before the wind, and staggered like a drunkard.

"Had not Master Barends better go below?" said Hans to his master, as he noticed the figure of the preacher near the cabin door.

The sea air had undoubtedly done him good; for his erect frame and healthy color contrasted strongly with his appearance at Van Alphen's in Brill. Just as Karel, who did not like to expose the preacher to the dangers of the fight which must ensue, was going to ask him to step into the cabin Barends anticipated him by walking up and saying:

"Do you not think, Yonker, it would be a good thing just to tell the men that they can do no good by murdering, but should take prisoners all who do not resist? As little blood as possible will make victory all the greater."

"You are right, Master Barends; but had you not better go into the cabin? for you may be killed," said Galama.

"I am not afraid," replied Barends, smiling, "and I can shelter myself."

The fact was, the preacher loved Galama deeply, and had resolved to remain on deck, to see how it should fare with him. Little did he know that his help would be wanted so signally. With evident satisfaction he saw that Karel called the men around him, and told them in short and energetic words that all unnecessary bloodshed must be avoided; that their object was to prevent the vessel from reaching the Zuyder Zee before them,

for by giving warning that they were coming she would defeat their whole expedition. He saw how the men looked up to their young and handsome chief with pride, and in many a face he could read the determination that his words should be followed. Galama then sent them to their several posts, and turned all his attention to the ship, which they were now fast approaching.

"Boat-hooks ready, and down with the gunwale," was then commanded; and in a few moments long poles, with tremendous iron hooks at the end, were thrown out at the Spaniard. She was a large three-masted vessel, expensively fitted up, but apparently badly manned, for but few heads could be distinguished on deck. As she was heavily laden, she lay level in the water with the privateer, and as if to add to the confusion, the whole deck was covered with bales and barrels, the crew having apparently been stopped in the attempt to throw them overboard. Galama stood in front of his men, with his cutlass drawn, waiting till she could be boarded.

Down came the hooks with a crash, tearing down the Spaniard's gunwale in several places. Some of the crew made a faint attempt to cut them, but soon stopped when they heard the bullets whistle past their heads.

"Over!" shouted Galama, and taking a tremendous leap, he led his men sword in hand to the enemy's ship. But they met with a warmer reception than they had bargained for. It appeared that the Spaniards had made a bulwark of the bales and barrels, right along the middle of their deck, from stem to stern, from behind which they now fired and fought with desperate courage. For a moment the Beggars fell back. Then Galama's voice was again heard, cheering them on, and his form was seen on the top of the bulwark. Suddenly a tall thin man rose up from behind it, and lifted a terrible iron club, with which he dealt him a dull-sounding blow on the helmet. The Yonker staggered, and fell back upon the deck.

No sooner did Barends, who had remained on the privateer, see this, than, heedless of any danger for himself, he rushed to where he saw the Yonker fall. A terrible struggle had at

that moment commenced over his body. The Spaniards rushed upon their bulwark, and the Beggars, maddened at the loss of their captain, flew against them. With an almost superhuman effort, the preacher succeeded in dragging the senseless body of Galama out of the *mêlée*, and with every nerve and sinew strained, he lifted him in his arms and carried him back into his cabin. There he laid him upon his bed, unfastened his helmet, which had a very deep dent in it, and began to bathe the pale face with water, moistening the lips at times with drops of wine.

The noise overhead became terrible. The sharp report of pistols, the clash of swords, the groans, shrieks, and curses of the wounded and dying, sounded horribly through each other. All at once there was a lull. What could it mean? Were they defeated or victorious? Suddenly the report of a cannon shook the ship, and made its beams creak and tremble. A deafening cheer followed, and the noise became more fearful than ever. Each time that, by the action of the waves, the two ships, which were fastened together, struck their hulls against each other, a dull heavy sound went through the ship, as if it were beating a sombre time to the horrible and deathlike music overhead. By little and little the pistol-shots stopped, the clash of the swords became less frequent, and at last nothing was heard but footsteps hurrying over the deck.

"Where am I?" said Galama, feebly opening his eyes.

"God be praised, you are alive again," said Barends, joyfully, reaching the Yonker a goblet of wine. "Drink some of that. Does your head ache?"

"Yes, my head!" said Galama, dreamily. "What have I been doing?"

"You were attempting to board a Spanish merchantman," answered Barends.

"Oh, I remember," said Galama, quickly, as he glanced round his cabin, and the whole scene again stood before his mind. "I hear no noise. Are they fighting? Have they won, or what?" and he endeavored to rise.

But Barends pressed him down softly, saying:

"Do not rise, Yonker; you have been unconscious. The fighting has only just ceased, but I will go and see what is the result."

As he rose to go to the door, some one was heard coming down the ladder. Galama seized his pistols, expecting it to be an enemy. But it was only Peter Blink, who tore open the door, and thrusting his head in, asked:

"Yonker here?"

"Yes, Peter. Come in and tell me what is the result of our fight," said Galama.

"O Yonker, I am so terribly glad to see your honor alive again," said Peter, with a burst of genuine joy, for once relinquishing his shortness. "We have taken them. Smashed them. Gold, silver, wine, bread, meat, and prisoners."

Galama and Barends smiled at this account of the capture, when the mate Willem entered the cabin, and likewise showed his joy at finding the Yonker alive. In answer to Galama's questions he said:

"We have captured the ship, Yonker. She has a valuable cargo of silk and wine, and there is a large sum of money. She carried fifteen men, all told, and seven passengers, all of whom have been made prisoners, besides ten of the crew; five have been killed. The admiral has signalled to cast her adrift. We have only lost three men, but some are badly wounded."

"Where is Hans?" asked Galama, with some concern.

"He is looking after some of the prisoners. But for him we might not be so fortunate as we are. The bulwark was not to be taken till he aimed one of the long guns at it, and shot a gap in it. From that moment we had won. There was one priest amongst the passengers who fought like a very devil."

"I will go and see the wounded and the dying," said Barends, rising. "You must take some rest now, and not attempt to rise for some hours. Willem will arrange all matters for you, and have the deck cleared and the prize cast adrift. I dare say you feel well enough, but no insubordination; I am your doctor now, so obedience!" And he tenderly pressed the youth down on the bed.

As the Yonker did not feel well enough, and could trust Willem perfectly, he took the advice. The evening came on, when he awoke out of a refreshing sleep, and going on deck, he sent the other away to take some rest.

The night air became cold, and the sea, which was running high, was at times sweeping over the ship; but the Yonker, whose inward emotions were somewhat in harmony with the elements, found a positive pleasure in thus battling with a more powerful foe than the Spaniards. As he stood at the helm, giving directions, his mind ran upon the events of his past life, when suddenly he saw Hans before him, faintly illuminated by the light of the compass lamp. The whole of his body was hidden in the darkness; but his face, as it stood out with a greater clearness, had a strange expression upon it, such as Galama had never seen there before.

"I want you to come down to the cabin, Yonker," he said curtly, and with a slight trembling in his voice.

"Why?" asked the Frisian. He could not

explain Hans's manner, and thought some mutiny had broken out.

"I have got a prisoner down below that you would like to see," answered Hans, pointing to the cabin.

"Who is it? Here, take the helm, and keep her head north, north-east," he said, giving the helm to one of the Beggars, and following Hans to the cabin. The door opened, and as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, he saw upon the same chair which he had occupied, no other person than Gerard Block, *alias* Father Sextus, his hands tied behind him, and two men by his side guarding him with drawn cutlasses.

Galama started, and grasped Hans's arm. He felt giddy, and it seemed for a moment as if the passions which were evoked by the sight of the prisoner were too strong to be mastered. But he calmed down, and when he had looked at the Jesuit for some moments, he laid his pistols upon the table, and said to the two men, "You can go, but one must watch before my door."

The men departed, and the trio were once more left alone.

CHAPTER XXV.

THREE MEET AGAIN.

"At last, then, we meet again," said Galama, in a calm voice, stepping towards the Jesuit, who sat on the chair with an air of dogged indifference on his face.

For some moments the two men looked at each other in silence, Galama with a touch of pity in his eyes, and Sextus with an undaunted, if not triumphant, look of defiance.

"Unfasten the ropes with which he is bound, Hans," commanded Galama, "and leave only his hands tied. If you make no attempt to move or liberate yourself," he continued, addressing the priest, "I shall speak to you without hurting even your body. But know you that at the least attempt your death will be inevitable."

"You do not mean to say that you want me to let this fiend loose again, Yonker?" asked Hans, in astonishment. "Why, it took me and three or four others to bind him. He fought like a tiger; besides, has he not deserved it?"

"Never mind. Give him no more pain than we can help. He knows what he has to expect now. Cut the strings, and stand behind him."

Hans slowly cut the strings, and taking a chair, sat down beside the priest, who seemed greatly relieved.

"The thing that astonishes me most in you," said Galama, after having looked at him in silence for some moments, "is that you can bear meeting me, and can look me in the face again without flinching. You must be singularly destitute of feeling not to experience at least part of the pain that you have caused me."

"Had you listened to my advice, and had I been allowed to work out my plan, Yonker, I assure you you would be better off than you are now," said the Jesuit, in an earnest tone.

"That is a good one," said Hans; and putting his mouth close to the priest's ear, he said, "How about the cavalry, old father, eh?"

A shade of anger passed over the priest's face, and after a moment he said:

"Of course, being in hostile hands and bound, I must submit to insults which otherwise no one would have dared to have offered me. But you, Yonker, who at one time seemed to feel some affection for me, suffer at least that I be not degraded by the poisonous breath of this boor."

"That boor gave you a good knock on the head once—ha, ha!" said Hans.

Karel gave his servant a look to silence him, and again addressed the Jesuit.

"I suppose you know that you are in the hands of the Sea Beggars, and in the midst of their fleet, so that escape is this time impossible. I have seen enough of your duplicity to make me distrust every word you say, but I would warn you to answer my questions straightforwardly and without any attempt at prevarication. You have everything to lose and nothing to gain by not complying with my wishes. I will not use violence with you, but you must answer me."

"I know that I am in the midst of a small fleet of vessels owned by men who style themselves Beggars of the Sea, and who pretend to wage war against Spain. But I would warn you, Yonker, because I have a great regard for you still, not to hurt a hair on my head. The ship in which I was this morning belongs to a fleet of merchantmen, the convoy of which is following closely, and may be upon you this night. I am a more important person than you think, and my death would be signally revenged upon every one of you, were it to happen."

"Talking about Beggars," said Hans, "I

"think you are the coolest of us all. What do you mean, sir, by threatening me and my master on board our own ship with the result of our acts? We will see your fleet coming, and pull their ears for them when they come," and he proceeded to perform that operation upon the priest.

"Let him alone, Hans," said Galama, sternly.

"He's only a lying hound of a Jesuit," grumbled Hans, falling back in his chair; "I would not make so much palaver with him, if I were you."

"Where is Agnes? where is my sister?" said the youth, stepping in front of the priest, and contracting his brow. His lip trembled with emotion.

"She's lost to you forever!" said the undaunted priest, in a sombre tone.

Galama's cheeks became ashy pale. He pressed his lips firmly together, and his eyes seemed to shoot flames. But he remained calm.

"I did not ask you that," he said. "Where are they?"

"They are lost to you forever!" was the answer again, given in the same tone.

"That's not the way to talk to him," muttered Hans, and looking fiercely at the priest, he growled, "I will drive my dagger into your ribs presently, brother, if you do not answer properly. Speak out."

"Silence, Hans," commanded Karel. "Sextus, or Block, or whatever your name may be, I warn you that your fate lies in your own hands. It is my strict duty to give you over to the admiral, and you know enough of Count Lumei's character to expect but little grace from him. But I can also hand you over to the commander of this vessel, my Lord de Treslong, and I can use my influence in averting your fate as much as possible. Which of these two do you choose? You must and shall answer my questions, or I will have you conveyed to the admiral to-morrow, and God have mercy on you then."

"I do not expect mercy from any one," answered the priest. "Think you I am terrified by your threats, Yonker? I thought you had seen enough of me to know that I

do not flinch before the drawn sword, and that death to me would be as sweet as life. My death would be an entrance to a blessed heaven, and rather than evade it by a disgraceful act, I would run to meet it, if it had been decreed in the counsels of the Almighty. I scorn your mercy."

"Oh, you hypocrite! you lying cur!" cried Hans, flying up and catching the Jesuit by the throat. "Do you remember this grip? Do you remember how I throttled you till your face was black, and then you cried for mercy, and promised to tell all? Out with it, you hound, or I will squeeze you to rights this time."

"Leave off, Hans. Quit the room. Do you hear me?" commanded the Frisian in an imperious voice, releasing the priest, whose face had become purple.

"And why, Yonker, should this fellow be treated as if he were a baby?" asked Hans, looking very fierce. "He's my prize, and if I had known that you were going to treat him in this manner, I would have cut him to pieces first. Do you not see that he is playing with you, and that he thinks you very soft. He's a kind of dog that should not be fed with pastry. Your nobleness and Christian principles will not have the least effect upon him."

But his master pointed silently to the door, so, muttering a curse between his teeth at the foolishness of some persons, Hans took his station before it.

"Is there nothing, nothing that will make you tell me?" the Yonker said in a tone of agony, stopping before the Jesuit. The latter was silent.

"You have done me a great deal of harm, Sextus," continued the Frisian, "but I forgive you that. Without having ever seen you before, and for some object which is up to this moment a mystery to me, you have crept into my friendship, and cruelly and cold-bloodedly maltreated whatever was dearest to me. Through you Count Egmont was sacrificed, and but for you my unhappy country might have been as free as the fishes beneath us. You have no reason for keeping Agnes and Maria confined. Tell me what I can do

to find their prison, and if mortal man can get them out of it I will."

He looked in anxious suspense at the prisoner, who hesitated a moment.

"First of all, my liberty," he said in a clear voice.

The Yonker frowned, and for an instant a heavy battle seemed to be going on within him. At last he spurned the thought from him.

"That I cannot give you, but I will plead for you."

"Plead!" repeated the Jesuit, scornfully. "I ask you for my liberty. You will not?"

"I cannot," said Galama, humbly.

"It would not be of very much use were I to tell you," said the priest. "I have told you before that they are out of your power."

Something in his tone seemed to imply what the Frisian hardly dared to think of.

"What!" he gasped, "are they indeed out of my power? Are they dead?"

"They are dead," repeated the priest.

Galama sank down on a chair. His head fell upon his arms, and rested upon the table. There was a dead silence in the cabin for some minutes.

"I know she is not," said Hans to himself, and going up to his master he touched him on the arm. The Yonker looked up, and even the priest seemed to shrink back from a sight so full of intense suffering.

"This will never do," said Hans. "He is not made of the same stuff that you are made of. I am sure a little torture will bring it out of him. Do just let me heat this dagger, and burn his lips. It is a splendid prompter."

Some may perhaps shudder at the ferocity of Hans, but the reader must recollect that torturing in that age was held legitimate by most persons, and that Hans spoke the language of nine out of every ten men in power.

Galama gave no heed to his servant's offer, and remained for some time in the position which we have described.

"Let him be kept in my cabin," he said, rising. He was calm, but pale as death. "Two men outside must keep strict watch, and allow no one to pass either way. Not even you, Hans. Wait, I will lock the door,

and take the key. He must go before his judges. I have not the power to punish him." And having locked the priest in his own cabin, Galama went on deck.

When next morning the faint glimmer in the east again heralded the coming of day, the Frisian was still on deck. The sea ran mountains high, the wind shifted from one quarter to another, and blew from all alike, with great force. All hands were constantly at work shifting the sails, and fleeing about to execute the commands of the Yonker, which followed each other in quick succession. The whole night they had been endeavoring to double the Helder, but owing to the foulness of the weather they were obliged to give up the plan and wait for daylight.

"I do not think we shall be able to do it, Yonker," said Hans, who was assisting Willem at the helm. "Do you see yonder vessels? I am sure the whole fleet is lying here in the same position in which we are. You had better go down below, and take some rest. We will drop the anchor, and I shall call you in a few hours."

"Yonker looks very bad," said Peter Blink, who was limping about.

And so he was. His face was pale, his eyes swollen, and his hair and beard, wet with salt water, were hanging in wild disorder.

"I will go and wash myself, at any rate," said he, handing his speaking-trumpet to the mate; and, descending the stairs, he unlocked the door of his cabin softly, and opened it without making the least noise. It was a small compartment, and was flanked on one side by Treslong's cabin, and on the other by the store-room where the ammunition was generally kept. The partition between the two latter compartments was, as is usually the case, not very thick.

As he entered his cabin he paused. There was a faint glimmering of light inside, and yet he was certain that the priest had been put on his own bed, well secured, and no light or anything inflammable was to his knowledge to be found in his room. Holding himself on by the door, he stepped inside, for the ship was rocking dreadfully. A few seconds

afterwards, he fled back out of the cabin and on to the deck, while at the same time a fearful explosion shook the whole ship, and clouds of smoke and flame filled the cabin.

"All hands at the pumps and fire hose!" shouted out Galama, and fled down the stairs again, followed by Hans and Peter, who was run over by half a dozen of his companions. Immediately the whole crew, without knowing what was going on, fled to their posts, and seeing smoke issuing from the direction of the store-room, a line was soon formed, and the buckets passed from hand to hand.

In the meanwhile Galama had reached the bottom of the stairs. The first thing he did was to shut his own cabin door, and then running to the door of the store-room, he gave it a tremendous kick. It flew open, and a burst of smoke and flames met him. Heedless of the danger, and shaking off Hans like a feather, he dashed through the flames. A moment afterwards he emerged, carrying a black mass in his arms; and making his way through the crew, who were in the meantime busy carrying water under the directions of Hans and Willem, he laid his load on the floor of Treslong's cabin, and returned to the crew.

"The fire is in the left-hand corner of the store-room, and in my cabin, my lads," he cried to the men; "keep everything wet. There's no fear of an explosion. Here, give me this bucket;" and taking a bucket from one of the men, he hastened back to the cabin.

"Here! out of the way! this is better than all your water," cried out the voice of Peter Blink, as he pushed the men away, and stumbled downstairs laden with the weight of an immense sail, which was dripping wet.

"Well done, small one! good idea!" cried the men, as they made way for the dwarf, who seemed to have forgotten his sprained ankle.

With the help of two or three others the dripping sail was carried into the store-room, and thrown over the flames, which in a few moments were subdued, and soon there was nothing left of the fire but the smoke and the smell.

"How did it come about?" cried several voices, as the men assembled round Hans and Peter, who were now the heroes of the hour.

"First, thank me and Peter for having saved you all from death," said Hans, "and then I will tell you." But the men would only give honor to whom honor was due; and as Hans had to acknowledge that he knew no more about it than they did, they were all in the dark, and gave themselves to guessing.

Leaving them to guess, we will explain the cause to our readers. When Galama had entered his little cabin, he became aware that the light did not shine in the apartment, but came through a hole in the wooden partition. Looking closer, he saw that a plank had been torn away, and in the opening, which was hardly large enough for him to pass through, he saw the light shining. A thought flashed across his mind. Could the priest have got loose and made this opening? Could he be in the ammunition room preparing mischief? He pressed himself before the opening and looked.

True enough, there was the priest, with a taper in one hand and a match in the other. By the dim light of the taper, Galama could see that one end of the match was attached to a keg of gunpowder, which, with three others, lay in the farthest corner of the room. This, however, did not frighten him, for he knew that all the barrels were empty, the powder having been given out by himself in the late fight. But behind him, and close to the door and to Galama, stood a little square box containing gunpowder, which had been used in the engagement of that day. Attracted by the noise which Galama made, the priest turned round. He uttered a cry of surprise when he saw the Frisian's face, and, not knowing the contents of the box, dropped the taper in his consternation. Galama fled back, and a second later the before-mentioned explosion took place.

Let us now follow Galama to the cabin, where, upon the floor, his head resting on a pillow, lay the form of the Jesuit. It presented a horrible spectacle. His clothes were for the most part scorched and burned, show-

ing in places the raw flesh underneath. His face was coal-black, his hair singed, and his red lips, as they parted in apparent agony, displayed his scorched tongue. He breathed with difficulty, and but for the long gasps which he gave at intervals, one might have supposed that naught but a heap of cinders was lying there. Galama fell on his knees beside him, and occasionally wetted his lips with some water.

At last Sextus opened his eyes, and for a moment they rested, with a vague and meaningless expression, on the anxious face that hung over him; but perhaps the movement of the ship, or the expression on Galama's face, restored him for a moment to his full consciousness. He cast at the Yonker a look of triumph, and something like a smile, something fearfully in contrast with his disfigured face, passed over his lips as they tried to mutter some words. Galama bent down, and caught the faint whispering—"Going down together!"

He shuddered. The rocking of the ship, the confused noises of the men who were still engaged in putting out the fire, the splashing of the water—these might indeed be taken for the sounds that are heard in a sinking vessel; and the idea that the man who had done him so much harm, and whom he had just dragged out of the flames, should triumph in their dying together, was almost too much for him. He had no conception of a spirit so relentless, so defiant.

But, as he rose to leave the miserable man to himself, for he saw that the Jesuit had but a few moments to live, the recollection that he knew the secret of Agnes's fate came upon him, and without further thought he resolved to make one more attempt to find out whether she was really no longer among the living. He flung himself on his knees before Sextus, whose breathing was becoming more and more difficult, and putting his lips close to his ear he said:

"Sextus, remember that within a few moments you will stand before your Judge; I beseech you, in His name and upon your eternal salvation, to tell me where Agnes and Maria are. I forgive you all you have

done me, but in the name of that merciful Jesus, whom you profess to follow, tell me."

He paused, and with every pulse within him throbbing, he put his ear to the dying man's mouth to catch the faintest accents. For some moments nothing but the priest's breath fell upon it; but suddenly, as if with the last flickering of the candle, he made a movement with his hand, and said in scarcely more than a whisper:

"Blessed Mother of God! They are dead, dead."

A slight quiver passed through his frame, and the Jesuit was a corpse.

For some time the unfortunate Yonker remained in the same position on his knees beside the body. He had not strength to rise, far less to go on deck, and possibly he would at that moment have been thankful to die too. There was now no more hope. During all these years that he had been at sea there had been within him a faint glimmering of hope, at one time weaker than at another, but never entirely extinguished, that Agnes was still alive, and the very idea that such was possible inspired him with new energy and courage. Even that night, when the priest had told him that they were out of his power and dead, he could not bring himself to believe it. But now the only being that could give him the answer to his question had passed away, and had passed away with the answer on his lips.

There lay Galama, with his head against the table, his arms by his side, and his eyes shut, almost as motionless as the body at his feet. Softly he repeated Agnes's name to himself, and every time he repeated it he felt as if, by some giant's hand, the foundations of his castles in the air were struck away; and from the bottom of his heart he sent up a prayer for strength.

"Come, Yonker, this will never do," said Hans, who had noiselessly entered the cabin and looked at the scene for some moments. He saw what had happened, and he knew what to do. He induced the Yonker to lie down in Treslong's hammock, and then calling Peter Blink, they took up the Jesuit's body between them, and carried it to Ga-

lama's cabin, where he had formerly been confined.

"I say, Peter," said Hans, "I think he is done with once for all, eh? But let us not make another mistake. This fellow was so awfully clever that you do not know but what it may be all feigning now, and he may be as sound as we are. Tell you what, we will pitch him into the sea. No cavalry there, eh?"

"Right," said Peter; "wrap him in his mantle;" and having fetched the Jesuit's mantle, which had been left in the other cabin, he proceeded to wrap it round the body.

"Stop! what is this? There is something in these pockets," said Hans, as his hand met a stout object in the folds of the cloth. He soon found the pocket, and drew out a little pocket-book and four or five letters.

"To the Vicar-General of the Holy Inquisition, Brussels," said Hans, reading the inscription. "'To his Excellency the Duke of Alva.' 'To the Reverend Father Hubert, Brussels.' Ah, what is this! Father Hubert! That is the little fellow. There may be something in this. Let us see;" and he opened the letter hastily, and began to read it. "What, Brother Sextus? 'Agnes Vlossert remains

heretic! Maria Galama died in the—' I say, Peter, old fellow, pitch this carrion away by yourself, and look out for more letters. I have got something here that will freshen the Yonker up."

And Hans ran into the adjacent cabin, and awoke Galama out of his stupor, and talked such a great deal about letters, and Jesuits, and nunnery, and Father Hubert, and Agnes, that his master became quite bewildered, and snatched the letters out of his hands.

They were despatches written by the abess of the nunnery of St. Clara, in Brill, by the burgomaster of the same town, and by the abbot of a convent in Flushing. The first, addressed to Father Hubert, informed him that since her last communications Maria Galama had died, but Agnes Vlossert remained a heretic, and was suffering the penalties of her conduct. The two others, amongst other matters, complained to the Duke of Alva and to the Vicar-General, that both towns were entirely without garrison, and that there were not enough soldiers to keep the peace. After careful examination, the entries in the little pocket-book convinced the trembling Yonker that after all his hopes were not extinguished.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MAN PROPOSES, GOD DISPOSES.

"MAN the long-boat, quick! Cast the anchor!" shouted Galama, leaping on deck. "Come along, there; what are you about? Down with the long-boat!" and in his impatience he seized a boat-hook and stamped with it on the deck. In a trice the men were on deck busy lowering the boat, which, however, was not easy, as the sea ran very high. At last it was got clear off the ship, and then the desperate work began. Up one wave, down another, tossed this way and that way, all but buried under the billows one moment, and almost thrown into the air the next, it seemed impossible for the boat to make its way to the admiral's ship, which was still tossing about with half-reefed sails. The men, however, were experienced, and had had many a hard pull upon the water. Silently did they bend at their oars, and notwithstanding the continual breaking of the waves over them, they advanced slowly towards their object. And the Yonker sat at the stern, looking only at that one object. His eyes glistened, his cheeks glowed, he recked not of the waves that drenched him, nor the gusts of wind which carried away his hat and floated it far behind him on the water. He continually cheered and encouraged his men, and offered to take one of the oars himself, which, however, they would not allow; he seemed a changed man. The old fire had returned to his eye, and upon his parted lips there played ever so little of a smile.

At last! The boat has reached the admiral's ship, and ere the crew can catch the ropes which are thrown out to them, Galama has seized the rope-ladder, and swung himself on deck.

"Where is my Lord de Treslong? I must see him at once, immediately! Tell him it is his lieutenant, Yonker Galama," said he to

one of the men who were standing round, and who seemed to be in authority.

The man turned round, and hastened to the cabin, from whence he presently returned with Treslong, whose astonishment at seeing our hero may be imagined.

"What is wrong, Yonker, that you come here, and in such a sea? But, no, there cannot be much wrong, for I have never seen you look so well in your life," said the astonished nobleman.

"On the contrary, my lord," said Karel, "glad tidings. Tell the admiral to signal the fleet to turn round. We must all go to Brill. We shall capture it to-day, if we get there in time. There is not a man of garrison inside. We must go."

"Eh! what! Brill! No garrison in Brill! Nonsense! Come upon the quarter-deck, and tell me all about it;" and Treslong hurried his visitor to the quarter-deck.

"Do you see the whole fleet lying before you, my lord?" said Karel, pointing to the vessels which were by this time all lying before the entrance of the Zuyder Zee, battling with the wind that blew from the coast with great briskness.

"We shall not be able to double the Helder; not one of us. Yesterday I captured that priest—the Jesuit—of whom I told you. Through him I know that if we sail to Brill or Flushing, neither of which had any garrison in them when he left two days ago, we may easily master the town and do with it what we like. If we could get possession of either of these places, we should achieve a greater victory than the prince has yet done."

"If we could indeed!" answered Treslong. "Think you Alva is such a fool as to allow either Brill or Flushing to be without garrison? When you have had my experi-

ence, Yonker, you will think otherwise. That Jesuit of yours has played you another trick, or perhaps he has said it to escape the torture with which you have threatened him."

"He is dead," said Galama, speaking rapidly. "In an attempt to blow us up he hurt himself so severely that he died; but after his death there were found upon him papers and a pocket-book, which told me that he had just come from Flushing to go to Spain, and intended to run into Ostend, and deliver despatches from his order in Brill and Flushing to the governor in Brussels. And here is one of the letters; read it, and see whether it does not corroborate my statements."

Treslong read the letter quickly. A smile came over his face, and before he had finished it he waved it in his hand, and cried out, "Magnificent! You have made a prize indeed, Yonker."

"I wish he would give me some of it, if it's eatable at all," said a voice behind them.

They turned round and cordially greeted the speaker. It was Adam van Haren, one of the cleverest seamen of the whole fleet, as he was one of the bravest soldiers.

"How do you come upon us so suddenly, captain?" asked Treslong.

"I suppose in the same manner in which you came, at least to judge by your boat," answered Van Haren. "I cannot get into that confounded Zuyder Zee, and I won't. I propose that we sail to the Channel. There are always Spaniards about there. But look, there is Simon de Ryk's boat coming hither too. See what haste he makes; he must, like me, have come off with very little breakfast. Confound this east wind! I was just rejoicing in the idea of a fine ham or cheese in Enkhuizen."

"I do not know whether it is such a bad wind after all," said Treslong; "what say you if we sailed to the Meuse, and dropped anchor at Brill? There is not much of a garrison there, and I do not suppose there are ten fighting men in the town that would not join our side, were we to turn up."

"Whew!" whistled Van Haren; "Brill! strong place that. Do you really mean it, my lord?" and he looked at Treslong as if

he had some doubts whether he was not mad.

"Mean it!" cried Galama, "of course we do, and so will you if you read this letter, which I intercepted on its way to Brussels."

"So that was your prize, Yonker," said Van Haren, returning the letter, which, owing to his indifferent education in that respect, he had rather spelled than read. "I could not fancy what was the reason, when I saw you actually smiling, a thing that I have not seen you do for years. I hardly know what to say to this. If it is true, it is simply magnificent. If it is false, why then of course we shall be beaten tremendously. I for one mean to try it. Here comes Dé Ryk. Let us hear what he says."

The new-comer, a short stoutish man of martial appearance, was heartily welcomed by all three. He had formerly been a wealthy merchant of Amsterdam, but having been banished in consequence of the operations of the Blood Council, he equipped at his own cost a ship of war. He was prudent, intelligent, and brave, and his love of country was equalled by his ardent affection and admiration for the prince. He listened to the news with a slight frown, and having heard all the *pros* and *cons*, he stood for some moments in silence.

"There is a great likelihood," he said, "that the letter is a hoax, and I do not attach much importance to it. But let us risk it. Surely we can fight on land as well as on sea, and though we are but few, we can make away with twice our number, I know. *Vivent les Gueux!* say I, and let us talk to the admiral at once."

There was something noble in the manner in which these men grasped at the idea, and were willing to risk their lives in the execution of a plan, the boldness of which verged upon desperation. For some time our heroes stood discussing the matter. At last Van Haren said:

"My Lord de Treslong, go you and acquaint the admiral with our plan."

"On the contrary, go you two," said Treslong; "the count is in bad temper with me and the Yonker."

De Ryk and Van Haren went away to find the admiral, while Treslong and Galama stood with their faces towards the helm, eying the fleet as it lay riding at anchor.

"Here's the admiral; what do you want with me, eh?" said a voice behind them.

Both turned round. Before them stood an immense man, with a mass of thick black waving hair hanging down on his shoulders and mingling with his equally long beard of the same color. He had a high and perfectly white forehead, gray catlike eyes, and a well-shaped nose. The lower part of his face was hid by his beard. But the sound of his voice was harsh and unpleasant, and the fire seemed to dance and flicker in his eyes, like those short and intense flashes of lightning which we see in the dark and gloomy cloud that threatens us with destruction. Although in his morning attire, he was dressed with great richness, and his well-fitting garb showed the magnificent proportions of his body to great advantage. He held one hand on the splendidly ornamented hilt of his sword; in his equally splendid belt were two pistols, the butts of which were made so as to represent the head of a wild boar; and his other hand, which grasped the baton, his badge of office, swung by his side. His whole appearance was that of a tyrant with a will as despotic as it was changeable; clever, haughty, and cruel, he was dreaded and abhorred by his foes, and by his friends feared, admired, and despised. It was William de la Marck, Count de Lumei. No sooner did he see Galama's face than he started back a step, and frowning terribly at the young man, said in a harsh and imperious voice:

"Sanglier! Lieutenant Galama! Why, sir, are you not on your ship? What are you doing here? I wonder you did not bring your whole crew with you! Go back at once, sir, or I shall have you sent back in my own way. I thought you were ordered to lead the van and double the Helder by sunrise this morning?"

"Which, as you see, is a physical impossibility, Count," said Galama, quite coolly. He knew the admiral, and was prepared to receive his language quite calmly. "I do

not know," he continued, "whether you have discovered any power to move our ships independently of the wind, for otherwise I know not how to execute your order this morning. We have been trying to do it the whole night, and I do not suppose we have come an inch nearer Enkhuizen than we were. We must alter our plan, Count."

"Alter our plan!" broke in Lumei, with a tremendous oath. "You shall go back to your ship, and you too, my lord; and if you cannot sail round the point, you must row it in boats, sir. By my father's soul! we shall make these Enkhuizers pay for it. If I get near them, I shall hang every mother's son of them, and fire the city;" and the admiral was just going to indulge in another volley of oaths, of which he seemed to have an unlimited supply, when a new-comer joined in.

"Not thus, not thus, my Lord de la Marck. These poor Enkhuizers have done us no harm, nor have their houses; and thou knowest our good prince is dead against violence."

"You too, De Ryk, and you, Van Haren!" exclaimed the admiral, turning round fiercely upon the two captains, who had returned to the quarter-deck. "Is this a concerted plan? and are you four the leaders of a mutiny in the fleet? If so, by the spirit of the Wild Boar of Ardennes, my ancestor, I shall arrest you all;" and he stamped fiercely on the deck. "Speak, my Lord de Treslong, do you perhaps intend to change places with me? Think you, your talents or your blood befit you more to be the leader of this fleet than me? If so, why are you silent?"

"Because, Count, the moments are too precious to be wasted in a dispute about the nobility of our races, even though that dispute take place betwixt the descendants of the Wild Boar of Ardennes and of the Duke of Gelre," replied Treslong, with dignity. "I knew not of the arrival of any of these gentlemen, but now that they are here I beg to greet them, for I have important news to communicate. Our Yonker here, as you well know, captured a Spanish merchant-ship yesterday, in which there was a priest, the carrier of despatches between Flushing and Brussels, which despatches have come into our hands.

They tell us that both Flushing and Brill are without garrisons, and may be had for the asking. What say you, Sir Count? Shall we steer thither, seeing that we cannot enter the Zuyder Zee to-day?"

"I am sure there is no garrison in Brill," cried De Ryk. "The wind is changed, Count, and your own vessel has cast her anchor. Brill is not very populous, nor large, and our fleet would strike a terror in the hearts of the poor burghers. Let us put about, and steer for the Meuse."

"Are you the admiral appointed over this fleet, or am I?" thundered De Lumei, who had been chafing under the speeches of both Treslong and De Ryk. "We have resolved in full council to go to Enkhuizen; and before the capture of a miserable hound of a priest or a little adverse wind shall make me change my plan, I will run my vessel on to yonder downs, and march my men straight through the country to the town. I have never been crossed in my plans yet by God or devil, and all the winds that ever blew will not induce me to prefer a wretched parcel of hovels like Brill, to the wealthy and large city of Enkhuizen."

"You are entirely mistaken, Count, in thinking that Brill is so poor," said Treslong, gravely, and the manner in which he spoke forced even De la Marck to listen to him. "You know my father was governor there, and I know the town better perhaps than any one in the fleet. There is a magnificent cathedral, two monasteries, and one nunnery, and there are far fewer partisans of the prince, and consequently more plunder than in Enkhuizen. Such as we are now, we can do nothing. What we can do there we know not—at any rate, not less than we do here, where we are in danger of being thrown on the coast in a gale."

"Our brave admiral is afraid!" said Van Haren, with a sneer. "We are but five hundred strong, and what can we do? I fear that we shall get bloody heads, and I advise all of you to sell your ships, and go and live in Germany or England."

"No, my friend," said De Ryk, slapping him on the shoulder, "we two will sail to

Amsterdam first, and cannonade the town. I told the burgomaster there that I would come back some day and wring his ears for him. Come along, since we are going to lie here and do nothing."

"I wish I had been with Herman de Ruyter," said Galama, passionately, "when he took the Castle of Louvesteen with twelve men. Courage seems to have died with him."

The poor admiral found himself in a cross-fire. Naturally impulsive and passionate, he was as obstinate as he was changeable and arbitrary. He would not give in to the four captains, though he acknowledged that to follow their advice was the best thing. But, at last, after half an hour's vehement discussion, Van Haren's irony, De Ryk's sarcasm, but above all the earnest reasoning of Galama and Treslong, changed his convictions, though to the last moment he kept up an appearance as if he would never consent to the plan.

"Farewell, Count," said Treslong and Galama, as, bitterly disappointed, they turned to leave; "we thought you had sworn to leave your hair and beard unshaven until you had revenged Count Egmont's death. If you go on in this manner, your hair will soon grow too long, and like Absalom's, it may become the cause of your death."

"D—n," roared the admiral, stamping with his foot; and swinging round, he caught up a speaking-trumpet. "All hands on deck!" Then turning to the captain, who came rushing up, he commanded, with a running commentary of oaths, "Fire the signal gun, and hoist up the signal to put the fleet to the wind, and tell them that if the order is not executed within half an hour's time, I will sink every ship that has not weighed anchor. Quick about there! My Lord de Treslong, you shall lead the van, for you know Brill well. Good day;" and as if to escape either their taunts or their thanks, he hurried down below.

"Thank God!" cried Galama, as he grasped Treslong's hand in feverish excitement; "now for it, my lord. Captain van Haren, allow me to thank you personally as

having done me a great favor, and you too, De Ryk."

"We have tamed the wild boar," said De Ryk, as in high spirits each prepared to join his own ship. "The whole country will ring with our exploit in a week."

"Hem! I wish I could get hold of some bread and cheese for my men," said Van Haren, "for I am sure I do not know how to feed them for another day."

They all laughed at this prosaic turn of the conversation.

"We shall have a splendid turn-out in Brill," said De Ryk, "at the expense of the duke and his tenth-penny. *Au revoir!*" and his head disappeared down the ladder.

"There must have been something besides this letter, which you got from that Jesuit," said Treslong, after they had gained the deck of their own ship, and their orders to weigh anchor and trim the sails having been executed, they were shooting through the waves towards the mouth of the Meuse; "for I have never seen Yonker Galama so excited and feverish before. Not even on the eve of the execution of the two counts."

"The horrible end of that poor Jesuit has worked upon my nerves, I dare say," said Galama, "and you must recollect that this is indeed a stupendous undertaking."

"No doubt of it, Yonker. We must now show the Spaniards what we can do," answered Treslong, gravely. "Of course we must keep very good watch lest any of the real partisans of the prince in Brill be in any way discomfited. But at the same time I think we must show that we have an abhorrence of everything that smacks of Popery, and I therefore think of proposing a new plan to punish all the monks and nuns in the town. We have so long played martyr, I wish to give them a turn."

Galama was silent, and looked down. Had he looked Treslong in the face, he might have noticed ever so little of a twinkle in his eyes.

"What I propose doing is this," continued Treslong; "after we are masters of the town, a party of soldiers must encircle the two monasteries and the nunnery of St. Clara, so

that no one can escape, and then set fire to them—then we shall see the bees swarming out of their nests—just as the Spaniards did with our people at the Geta; when Count Hoogstraten and two or three hundred poor devils had fled to a church, they stood round it, set fire to the church, and saw every man-jack die before their eyes. Would you not like to see some little nuns jumping about in the fire?"

"Never!" exclaimed Galama, coloring.

"Well," said Treslong, "I was only in fun about the burning. But I am determined upon one thing. I shall break open the doors of the convents, and tell my men to play old Harry with the tiny creatures. They can marry them if they like, and I dare say they will find a handsome dowry within."

"My lord," said Galama, eagerly, his cheeks flushing and his eyes brightening as he spoke, "I know not whether you are in earnest, but I charge you on your honor to forbid your men from doing any such thing as you have just said."

"Chivalrous youth!" sneered Treslong. "Has not Popery done enough with you yet?"

"It has, my lord, but I shall never consent to this. Most of these creatures are innocent of all the crimes imputed to them, and how do you know but that amongst them there may be—a—" He stopped and blushed at his own eagerness. He was trembling at the very idea which Treslong had broached.

Treslong looked at him for a moment with a smile upon his lips, and then bursting into a hearty laugh, he said:

"When another time you tell me your secrets, Yonker, do not forget afterwards that you *have* told them. I saw you turning red when I mentioned the nunnery on the admiral's ship, and there is not much sagacity required to make me suppose that one dweller within its sombre walls is at least the cause of one-half your ardor."

Galama blushed and was silent. Treslong continued kindly:

"I hope you have seen enough of me to

know that I would never dream of committing such cruelty as I proposed. I feel for you, and if there is anything I can do in helping you to recover your betrothed, Agnes Vlossert, you have but to mention it, and you may depend upon me." And he gave the Yonker his hand, which was cordially accepted.

And thus that little fleet of twenty or twenty-two vessels, of which the two largest, those of Treslong and De la Marck, were both smaller than a frigate of the present day, set out upon that famed expedition which was destined to open that memorable struggle, at the end of which Spain, with her immense wealth, power, and influence, was to succumb to the determination and courage of a people not one-fourth her equal in number.

But noble as was the enterprise, it was not at first conceived in the manner in which it was afterwards executed. De la Marck, the ferocious corsair, consented to it solely because he had nothing else to do, and preferred a little plunder to none. Van Haren was willing to risk his life in it, because he wanted to provide his men with victuals, for, as he sagely said, "If we are to die, it is better to die in storming a city than by starvation, which is a meagre glory indeed." And such was the feeling of almost the whole fleet. Desperate almost to madness, the men were ready to do anything, if there was the least chance of success, and as Brill was known to contain a good deal of wealth and

provision, they were eager to come to action, though they should be opposed by twenty times their number. Even Galama, we must confess, did not act from purely patriotic motives. One of his chief reasons was if possible to liberate Agnes, and after having taken Brill, to stock their fleet well, both with provisions, men, and money, to spike the cannon, to destroy the defences, and to leave the town; thereby, as he hoped, to inspire his countrymen with some courage, and to let them know that there were still men to be found who would be able to fight, and to fight well, whenever the time came. That was the idea which Galama had at first pictured to himself.

It was only the clear heads of Treslong and, be it said, of Simon de Ryk that looked farther. They saw that instead of spiking the guns and destroying the fortifications, instead of leaving the town to fall once more into Spanish hands, instead of reviving the courage of their countrymen by an idle show of bravado, they could, with the same trouble, and with infinitely more advantage, make Brill the first stone of the bulwark of independence, and turn those cannon and those fortifications into instruments in their own hands for the destruction of their oppressors.

While Treslong and the Frisian sit discussing the scheme in their cabin, and all the important consequences rise up before their eyes, we must for a moment leave them, and lead our readers to the nunnery of St. Clara.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REST AT LAST.

IN a small cell, sparingly furnished with two beds, and such articles of furniture as are indispensable in sleeping apartments, we find two women dressed in the unvarying gray woollen garments of the convent of St. Clara. One of them reposes in a low wooden chair, and turns her eyes with an expression of great anxiety to one of the beds, where the thin and worn face of Maria Galama rests upon the pillow. It is Maria, but ah, how changed! The straggling mass of naked boughs and withering branches can offer no greater contrast to the once blooming forest, with its varied splendor of foliage and all its grand effects of light and shade, than did Maria, as we see her now, to the once blooming and buoyant maiden. There was beauty still in her face. The gripe of death, though merciless, could not altogether dim the lustre of her eyes, or disturb the soft and delicate outline of her rounded chin. But the eyes were sunken, the cheeks were wasted, and the lips only parted to give passage to a short cough or a hard and difficult breathing.

During the years which the two girls had spent in the convent, the disease from which Maria had long been a sufferer, had advanced more rapidly every day. She felt that she was approaching her end, and she rejoiced in the prospect. As we have already seen, on the eve of their imprisonment, Agnes's example and influence had not been without effect upon her; and after they had been removed to the nunnery, and its doors had closed upon them, she had made the firm resolution never again to recede. She felt her faith strengthened, and she was now even willing to undergo persecution, if it should be God's will to bring it upon her.

The reason why Sextus had conveyed them to the nunnery, instead of sending them with

all the other prisoners to Brussels, was very simple. He considered his plan this time so perfect, and was so confident of its success, that he foresaw the possibility of making a great use of these girls after he had obtained as much information from the Yonker as he could, and, most of all, that he might get a great deal out of them, should he again happen to be successful. The abbess of the nunnery was his aunt, and he respected and admired her as a clever and strong-willed woman. She had, in the opinion of many people, a special gift of conversion, and her nunnery was always full of girls of all ranks, who were either afraid of coming in contract with the many heresies which were abroad, or who, having been already to some degree tainted by them, were confided to her care in order that she might bring them again into the right way, and shelter them at the same time from the hands of the inquisitor. To this woman Sextus confided his prisoners, and to her he applied after he had been frustrated in his treacherous designs by our friend Hans, who, he knew, had escaped the trap set for him, though he did not expect him once more to venture in the lion's den merely to save his master.

But if he hoped to get possession of the two girls again, he reckoned without his host.

The abbess flatly refused to give them up; nay, she would not permit him to see them, or to employ any means whatever in forcing them to confess. His promises and his threats were alike met with indifference. The abbess pointed to her charters from the Pope and from Charles V.; protested that she was neither afraid nor ambitious; that she had never allowed any nun to leave the convent, and that she had resolved not to give two such pupils for heaven out of her hands. Very much disappointed, but disin-

clined to vex his aunt, who had been of great use to him in his ambitious career, he allowed her to have her own way, and left the two girls to be prepared for heaven in the abbess's best style.

At first Agnes and Maria occupied the same cell, and received their daily training side by side. But ere long the abbess found that she had to deal with harder metal than usual, and must employ other arguments than finery, music, and ceremony to produce the desired effect. For what she taught them in the daytime was discussed and refuted by the two girls when they were alone in their cell, and, like the Danaides, the abbess perceived that she made no progress whatever. They were separated, and only allowed to visit each other in the presence of one of the sisters, who shared their respective cells. And now there began a trying time for the two girls, but especially for Maria. They had daily to listen to what they knew to be utterly false, without being able to console and strengthen each other. They were frequently punished for not complying with the orders of the convent; they were moreover entirely in uncertainty as to what had become of the baroness and of Karel. Day by day Maria faded under the blast of this north wind, and day by day, as Agnes saw her lovely cheeks grow thinner, and her body waste away under a dress so sombre, so expressive of eternal sameness, without hope of escape, a deep sigh escaped her breast, and she turned herself with more intense love towards that Saviour for whom they were thus suffering. And the bitterest part of Agnes's agony was her fear that the continual dripping might wear out the stone, and that Maria, unsupported by her, and without even so much as a Bible, might again be brought to hesitate. When she saw her, she had but little opportunity to speak with her, and never could she speak about those matters which were dearest to both. Thus three years passed slowly and tamely; every day exactly like the preceding and the following, and every day diminishing the dormant hope that they would regain their liberty.

But one day even the abbess was pleased

to become anxious about Maria's condition. There could be no doubt about it that the poor girl was dying fast, and in the opinion of the abbess, the meek and silent patient had a strong claim upon as much attendance and skill as could be had. Instead of the old woman who used to share her cell, she received permission to have beside her a younger sister, Anne, who, next to Agnes, seemed to be her best friend, and who became her careful and tender nurse from that moment. The abbess also allowed Agnes to visit her cousin, such not having been the case for more than a year. The two girls, once more together, sobbed on each other's breasts, and could hardly be separated, though, but for the evidently good effect which her visit produced upon Maria, Agnes, the obstinate, the fearless, the heretical Agnes, would have been condemned to remain in her narrow and lonely cell, while she knew that her cousin was gently passing through the border-land between life and death.

The second time that Agnes visited her cousin, they found out, to their intense joy, that Sister Anne, instead of being, as the abbess thought, the most bigoted of all her flock, was deeply tainted with heresy herself. After having assured herself that no one could witness or hear what passed between them, this good nun requested Agnes to speak to her of Jesus and the Bible; nay, produced a copy of the New Testament, which she kept carefully hidden in the folds of her dress. The joy of the two girls may be imagined. They hung over the precious book, and many a time the walls of the little cell were the silent witnesses of their devotion as they kneeled before their invisible and adored Saviour.

It was necessary to observe great care, however. Sister Anne could not always watch by Maria's bedside, and she had to share her post with another sister, who was in reality as bigoted and devoted a Catholic as Ignatius Loyola himself.

It was Sister Anne whom we now find resting in a low chair by the side of Maria's bed. She was a woman of some thirty years, not handsome, nor with anything about her that

might be called striking or even impressive. But she looked the very picture of honesty and fidelity, and it could be foretold that she would be the last person to betray her friend. She watched the sleeping Maria, with a grave look on her face. At last she said to herself, as she rose :

"I do not know, but I feel as if Maria will not live much longer. Agnes has not seen her for a week now, and I think it would do them good to see each other. The abbess forbade me, but perhaps they may never see each other again. I will go and fetch her." And softly opening the door of her cell, she stepped out of the room.

The convent consisted of a square court enclosed by three galleries and an abbey, or church, the latter being situated on the side of the square opposite to the iron gate. The galleries, or oblong buildings which formed the three other sides, had on the ground floor the apartments used as dining-halls, infirmaries, libraries, working-rooms, etc., while the second floor consisted of the dormitories. The room of Agnes lay at the other end of the northern gallery, whither, walking softly in order not to disturb the sleepers or the occupiers of the other cells, Sister Anne went and fetched her. It was not long before the two women were sitting at Maria's bedside, and watching her, as her bosom rose and fell under her irregular breathing. There was a great contrast between the two cousins, as their faces were brought so close to each other. All the persecution, punishment, and suffering which Agnes had endured had not been effectual in robbing her of her health nor her cheeks of their roses. Her carriage was as elastic and erect as ever, and her eye shone with its wonted clearness. She, too, remarked the great difference which the last week had made upon Maria; and as she pressed a soft kiss upon the cheek that was colored with a little burning spot, a tear fell upon it. Maria opened her eyes, and when they met those of her cousin she smiled happily, and tried to rise and embrace her; but her strength failed her, and she sank back again, coughing painfully. Agnes knelt down at the bedside, and encircled Maria with her

arms, who seemed perfectly at rest within them, and laid her head, with a beautiful look of peace, upon her shoulder.

"Do you know that I was dreaming, Agnes dear?" said Maria, in a soft voice; "and I dreamed that I saw you dressed in gay clothes, and by your side walked Karel."

Agnes blushed, and pressed Maria closer to her with a sort of spasm. She had been trying to forget Karel, for she thought it was God's will that they should meet no more on earth, and if that were true, to think of him would only be to nurse within herself an incurable disease. She might have known that the disease was incurable already, for fight and pray as she might, his image was before her forever, and every mention of his name filled her with a longing which she could not bring herself to acknowledge as anything wrong. She pressed another kiss upon Maria's forehead, and said :

"If it be God's will, Maria, I shall see Karel again; but I am afraid that He has determined it otherwise. It seems so perfectly hopeless to think ever to escape out of these sombre walls. And even then I should not know whither to turn."

"We are in God's hand, Sister Agnes," said Anne, "and He can work wonders."

"But I dreamed more than that, Agnes," said Maria. "I dreamed that I saw my dear mother, bright as an angel, beckoning me to come, and I think I am going home, Agnes. I am tired of lying here at the gate of heaven, and of hearing heavenly music mingle with the dying sounds of the tide of worldly thoughts as its waves still play around me, and try in vain to bear me away from that happy shore which God has purchased for me."

Agnes said nothing. It was a hard struggle for her thus to part with the only being she now had on earth whom she could speak with and trust. It was a hard struggle for her to acquiesce in God's will, when it bereaved her of the only joy in her present life. And yet she was glad, for she knew that it was best for her cousin, whom she was now fully assured no human power could tear out of His hands.

There was a moment's silence, which was interrupted by the dying girl's cough, which seemed to give her great pain, though through all her illness not a single complaint had escaped her lips.

"Have you much pain, Maria?" asked Agnes, softly.

"I have not so much now as I have had, Agnes, dear," answered Maria; "but my only fear is that I have not had enough of it. When I think of the sufferings of Jesus, and of those of the martyrs who die every day for Him, I am ashamed that I have shrunk from it, and have preferred this miserable life to the crown of everlasting glory. I sometimes fear that I have incurred God's irrevocable anger already." And tears stifled her voice.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," said Sister Anne, reading out of the little Testament before her.

"And I have sinned greatly," said Maria, and her face showed that she felt deeply what she said; "but the Lord will not deal with me according to my transgression. I have never been happy since that evening at Brussels, Agnes. There was ever a voice within me, reminding me that I had denied Jesus, and at one time it almost drove me to despair. I had grown almost well again, and I was rejoicing in the prospect of going back with you to Brill, when that fearful night intervened. From that moment it was as if all hope, all joy was past for me, and the very idea of heaven and of God filled me with despair. O Agnes, I *have* suffered. It is a fearful thing to deny Him, when we come to look at the object for which we do it, for the paltry things which we preferred to His heavenly peace. He is surely very gracious to forgive so great a sinner."

"And I, too, have denied Him before men," sobbed Anne, who lay on her knees, with her head bent over the little volume which rested on the bed; "I have been afraid; I have thought it better and wiser to make the abbess believe that I was a Catholic, though I hate and abhor it. From this time I shall do so no more, Agnes. We shall praise Him

and suffer for Him together. I can bear this no longer."

"Read the fifth chapter of Matthew to us, Anne," said Maria.

Anne turned to the chapter, where Jesus proclaims to the multitude those wonderful doctrines. There was but a little lamp burning in the room, and the whole convent, as they thought, had gone to rest. With a soft and tremulous voice, the nun began:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Her voice gained strength and firmness, however, and in a low, clear tone she proceeded. She came to the tenth verse,—
"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,"—when a shriek startled them in their pious reverence.

"Holy Virgin! Blessed Mother of God! What is this! Sister Anne, say what is, this!"

With these words the stately and bewildered form of the abbess, who had heard the reading as she passed the door, rushed in amongst the three girls.

For a moment both Agnes and Anne were too frightened to speak. The abbess caught up the little book which lay on the bed, and which they had not endeavored to conceal.

"The holy Evangel of Saint Matthew!" she cried out; "dare you read such heretical books in this convent? You, Sister Anne, who have professed to me over and over again that you were a pious Catholic!"

"But who shall do so no more," answered Anne, calmly rising. "I am no longer a Roman Catholic, so help me God, if it is sin for a Catholic to read these words to a dying girl, who thirsts after something better than mere Latin masses."

"Dying? Who is dying? Is it—?"

She looked at Maria, and her face told her that Anne spoke the truth. The mere thought that a soul should thus pass away from earth in the midst of heresy made her almost frantic. She seized the dying girl by the shoulder, and said:

"Maria! Maria! would you die and be eternally lost? Would you die without having received absolution and extreme unction,

and without having partaken of the most holy sacrament? Jesus! Maria! child, awake! listen not to these foul-mouthed advocates of Satan, but pray the saints that they may give you an hour in which to prepare yourself for entering purgatory!"

The abbess was in a fearful excitement. She trembled in every limb, and her voice shook with emotion. She watched the face of the sick girl with breathless attention, as did also the two.

A beautiful smile lit up the face of Maria, and with her eyes looking up to heaven, she said, or almost breathed, "Jesus." There was a pause, and then fixing her eyes upon the abbess, she said, "No one cometh unto the Father but by Me."

The abbess stood terrified, and ere she could recover breath to answer, Maria again spoke.

"Agnes," she said, pressing her cousin's hand, "I am going—my sufferings are over. I have at least been allowed once to proclaim—Jesus;" and with these words on her lips her spirit passed away into fellowship with Him.

"This is your work," said the abbess, turning to Agnes, who lay kneeling before the bed, whilst she sobbed and prayed for strength. She felt entirely prostrated, and could almost have asked God to let her pass away too.

"You two shall suffer fearfully for that you have allowed this spirit to pass away without invoking the aid of the Church," said the abbess, in a low and trembling tone, in which there lay a whole wealth of anger; and snatching up the little book, she went out of the cell, and locked the two girls in with the corpse.

They passed the night beside it with prayer, repeating such passages of the Bible as they could remember. The next morning they were both seized, bound, and conveyed to separate cells under the church. The abbess had spoken the truth when she said that they should suffer. It was no acute pain that was inflicted on them. It was diabolical slow torturing, with hunger and thirst, relieved occasionally that they might afterwards feel the want all the more. Thus Agnes lingered on in darkness at times, in dusk always, sing-

ing psalms and praying, and was often an involuntary listener to the mass which was chanted above her, and which she accompanied with her own words of unshaken faith.

One day, about a fortnight after she had been taken thither, she lay feverish and hungry on her little bed of straw. She had just had a visit from the abbess, and it needed all her strength to withstand the priestess, who, now by entreaties and promises, now by threatenings and inflictions, endeavored to induce her to change her faith. She was fervently praying God that He might take her away, or send help; for she felt that she could not much longer have the strength to withstand the temptation. Suddenly the door of her cell opened, and the abbess again stood before her.

"Rise," she said in a harsh tone. "You at least shall suffer as much as any of us; you who are such a martyr."

Agnes rose, and followed the abbess through the halls. The whole convent seemed to be in commotion. Vans full of valuable tapestries and robes were standing in the garden, and many of the nuns were running hither and thither, as if in great alarm. At a loss what to think, she followed the abbess and a few other nuns through the streets of Brill, which she had not trodden now for four years. But all her recollections and sensations were drowned in curiosity; for wherever she looked she saw scared faces, or tears, or people loading their valuables on vans and carts. She was all wonder. "Could the town be besieged by the prince?" She dismissed the suggestion as ridiculous, and asked the nuns, but was answered with silence.

At last they arrived at the monastery of St. Peter, which was far stronger than the nunnery, and here, in a small room with other nuns, she heard that the Sea Beggars had come with their fleet, and were going to storm the town in an hour, and murder everybody. The reader can judge of her joy at this intelligence. She counted the minutes, and grew impatient when the clock struck the hour, nay, two hours, and darkness fell over the city, but no Beggars came.

But, hark ! do you hear that shout ! There they are, God be thanked ! They are coming. No, it is only boys and apprentices. But no, the noise increases. Blows are heard on the door of the monastery. The nuns grow frightened and shriek. The blows are redoubled ; the nuns fall into each other's arms and weep : only Agnes and Anne sit there trembling with impatience, whispering hopeful words into each other's ears. At last the door gives way, and with a shout of victory the men run in the direction of the shrieks, with which their laughter mingles. The door flies open, and a motley crew, apparently half men, half devils, burst in upon them.

Agnes is seized by a tall man without nose

or ears, who curses and swears he will have some good spoils out of priestcraft, at any rate. Agnes cries out that she is a patriot. But the fellow snatches her in his arms, and carries her out of the convent into the street. She struggles, but in vain : she is almost swooning. Gathering her last strength she cries, " Karel, Karel, Galama ! "

"Halloo," shouts a gruff voice before them. "Galama ! what's this ? By all the powers it must be Mistress Agnes."

And a little fellow jumps like a cat at her assailant's throat. A terrible combat ensues, and Agnes swoons away.

But we have anticipated the course of events, and we must now resume the thread of our narrative.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FIRST OF APRIL.

"COME, ferryman, give me and my two friends here a speedy pull across, and I will give silver for thy trouble, which I warrant thou seest not every day."

So saying, a little man, whose dress, notwithstanding a long sword at his side, made him known as a clerk or student, followed by two others of a more martial appearance, stepped into the ferry-boat, where Peter Koppestock, the ferryman, was ready to do his duty by conveying them across the Meuse to the town of Brill. It was a bright morning, or rather noon, on the first day of April, 1572, and the sun danced merrily upon the narrow stream.

"May be I have had more silver to handle than you wot of, master," answered Koppestock, as he seized his oar and pushed off. "But to be sure," he continued, "there's no one now will be inclined to boast of great possessions, since he has to give it all away in pennies. I for one do not covet them, for he who has naught has naught to lose."

"What sayest thou about these pennies, friend?" inquired the little man, nervously. "I would not say that they were bad, and yet they seem to me to press heavily upon thee."

"Not upon me, master," answered the ferryman, rowing lustily, "for I have naught to pay them with, and as I said to my wife, a tenth-penny of naught is naught. But even if I had it, I would assuredly pay nothing of it to the duke."

"Heigho, my man, thou speakest boldly of the duke," said the other, with a tone of authority. "Thou knowest perhaps not who we are, else thou wouldst curb thy tongue somewhat! We are officers in the army of his most Catholic Majesty the King of Spain, and were we not of very good humor we might make thee repent thy rashness."

"I thank thee, Sir Officer," replied Koppe-

stock, putting a stress upon the title, for he saw the two passengers smile when they heard the revelation of their dignity; "but I am none the less inclined to repeat my words. Surely a man may be a good and pious Catholic, and as good a subject of the Count of the Netherlands, for kings we have never known in these parts, without consenting to be utterly ruined for the sake of a parcel of pot-bellied monks and priests, and an army that has no right to be here. The most devoted of subjects, if he does not belong to the army, objects to become a beggar."

"Well, by our good Lady of St. Clara," ejaculated one of the other two men, "I never dreamt that Peter would beat thee in thy tongue so well, Ralph."

"Thou hast good laughing," replied the little man; "but I swear ere this sun has set upon us sinful mortals, I shall make this rebellious fellow rue that he has used such untoward language. Knowest thou not, fellow, that there be vessels unto honor, and vessels unto dishonor, and that the latter should never think of pronouncing judgment, or putting themselves on a level with their higher brethren? Thou shalt rue it, I tell thee."

"Then I would say," responded the ferryman, not heeding the threat of the manikin, though he sat boldly and puffing with wrath in the boat, "then I would say that *those* are the most honorable vessels that are the most useful; for she who carries naught but ornament has little on her."

"I know not what ye talk of honorable or dishonorable vessels," said the other companion, who had been looking attentively towards the mouth of the river; "but methinks yonder I can see some vessels coming hither that are likely to be neither. They seem too numerous and out of shape for merchantmen. What may they be?"

All turned their eyes in the direction in which the speaker pointed, and saw a crowd of white sails glittering and shining in the sunshine, and advancing up the river. They were as yet too far to be clearly distinguishable, though red banners and streamers were seen flapping in the wind. For some moments all were intently occupied in gazing.

"It is a peculiar flag, anyhow," said Koppestock, resuming his oars, which for a moment he had dropped, "and all of the same kind too. I have my suspicions."

"Tell us what they are, my man," said the little fellow, "since thou art better acquainted with all manner of ships than we are."

"You seem to be excellently well acquainted with all kinds of vessels, master," replied Koppestock; "but since the threats which you have held out to me, I dare not breathe the name of an enemy within your loyal ears, for fear of losing mine."

"Thine are *not* loyal," said the other, "but I command thee in the king's name to tell me."

"In what king's name?" asked the undaunted ferryman, pulling slowly.

"Well, in the duke's then, if thou fearest him more, or thou shalt rue it."

"Again?" cried Koppestock. "But since you have commanded me I must tell. Yon fleet there is, to the best of my knowledge, the Sea Beggars' fleet."

"Eh! what! Sea Beggars!" cried the three men, starting up together, and gazing at the sails. The ferryman bent over his oars and chuckled.

"There are at least fifty ships," said the little man, "and they are approaching quickly. Here, my good man, take this, and row us rapidly to the shore, for they might come upon us and do harm. What say you?"

"They'd certainly murder you if they caught you, Sir Officer. So I shall row;" and taking the large piece of silver that was offered to him, the ferryman pulled as for his life. It was hardly necessary to pull at all, however, for in two strokes the boat lay alongside of the shore. The three men jumped out, and discussing the matter in evi-

dent astonishment, they left the ferryman with his quickly earned silver to himself.

"Ha, ha! I never saw so great a fool! He was not ten yards from the shore, and grew afraid. The Sea Beggars too! I wonder what they want here. They are a queer set. But, never mind, there's no one to row across, so I shall just go and meet them." And turning his boat, he rowed in the direction of the fleet, which came up in full sail.

He had not rowed for more than ten minutes when he stopped, for he thought he heard his name called, and turning himself in his boat, he looked at the first ship, which was now close to him.

"Ha! what do I hear? Hans! and Treslong's arms in the flag! Am I dreaming, or—no—yes, by the holy Virgin, they *are* the Sea Beggars."

"Peter, Peter!" at this moment cried Hans, leaning over the bow of his ship, which was foremost, "do you hear, Peter? Come here."

"What d'ye want?" growled Peter Blink, limping up behind him.

"Get out of the way, you fellow," said Hans; "don't you see I am calling Koppestock? Peter!"

"Halloo!" answered the ferryman, shooting up to the bow of the ship, "who is calling me? Is that you, Hans? Is this Lord de Treslong's ship?"

"One of them," said Hans, with an air of importance. "Come up! I want you."

"I am coming fast enough," said the ferryman; and seizing a rope that was thrown out to him, he dexterously swung himself up, and stood beside Hans on the deck.

"So you have come at last," he said, shaking his friend's hands cordially. "You have been long enough about it. What are you going to do with all the ships? Are you the captain of this one? It is a fine one, and no mistake."

"The Yonker and I, we take it between us," said Hans, gravely. "We are coming to cannonade the whole town. Come along to my Lord de Treslong. He's on board."

Treslong, Galama, Barends, and Willem were standing near the stern of the ship,

apparently engaged in a deep discussion. They were looking at the town, which could be distinctly seen about a mile off the shore. A crowd of people were on the walls, gazing at the ships.

"My lord," said Barends, "God has given us this fine opportunity. Let us not spoil it by being rash, and turn His first blessing into a curse. Let us send a parley, and demand surrender first, before we take other steps."

"Your suggestion is not bad," said Treslong; "the Yonker is somewhat too impatient. But is it not likely they will hang the messenger, and shut the gates? But who is coming here? Hans and — what, Koppestock! The ferryman! he's exactly the man we want. Hail! my friend."

"My lord, may the Holy Virgin bless you forever, and prosper your race," said the ferryman, sinking on one knee, and seizing Treslong's hand with a passionate and yet respectful gesture. "I have not seen your face since you saved me and mine from starvation, nor could I ever express my thanks to you. Receive them now."

"Oh, I forgot that circumstance," said Treslong, good-humoredly. "But it was more my father than I who did it. But rise, my friend, and tell me, is there any garrison in Brill? You see our fleet here takes a bold position. What know you of the state of the town?"

"I know that there are scarcely half a dozen soldiers within the walls, my lord," answered Koppestock; "and were you now to march your soldiers to them, you would easily get in. There has just been high mass, and the churches are full of silver and gold vessels of all sorts, which alone, to be sure, would pay you your expenses."

A short consultation between the four men took place. Then Treslong, turning round, said:

"Come along with us to the admiral. I suppose you fear not to carry to the town a message from the count?"

"Not I, my lord, not I," cheerfully answered the ferryman; "all that I have is thine, and since thou art a Beggar, so am I. Command me, and I'll do it."

Treslong, Galama, Koppestock, and Hans now went to the ladder, where the long-boat lay ready to receive them. Treslong had gone down, and Galama was just following, when he saw Hans standing beside him, ready to follow him. He stopped, and said, "Remain here, Hans! You know for what."

"Not if you hang me! Why should I stop?" he asked.

"I told you. Pick out a dozen hearty men. We have yet to enter the convent of St. Clara!"

"Ah!" said Hans, putting his finger to his nose, "I forgot that." Then turning to Koppestock, he said in a confidential whisper, "I cannot go with you to the admiral, but the Yonker will. Do not mention my name to the count, because he and I are at loggerheads. I shall see you back presently."

The ferryman, who rejoiced to find that Hans had become such a great personage, thanked him for his instructions, and descended the ladder. A few strokes of the six men who rowed the boat brought it alongside the admiral's ship, where great preparations for landing the men were evidently being made. Count de la Marck stood on deck, dressed in a magnificent breastplate and an equally costly Beggar's hat, made of the skin of a wild boar, the plume and diamond buckle of which alone were worth a little fortune. When he saw Treslong, he exclaimed:

"Ha! my lord, I was going to send for you. How shall we do, think you? Storm the town at once, or ask them to buy us off? They will give us a handsome sum."

"I would advise neither, cousin," said Treslong, coolly. "I have brought you a ferryman who is well known in the town, and has known me for years. He says there is no garrison in the town, and there will hardly be any resistance. Let us demand a surrender."

"Ha!" said Lumei, pouncing upon the ferryman, "is that God-forgotten Papist of a Meertinck still burgomaster of Brill?"

"Ay, ay, my lord, and frightened he will be at this moment," answered Koppestock.

"Go and tell him that I, William Count de la Marck, Baron of Lumei, Admiral of the

fleet of his Highness the Prince of Orange, the lawful Governor of these provinces, demand the instant and unconditional surrender of the city of Brill. And tell the scoundrel in my name, by way of confidential advice, that if he is not here in half an hour with the keys, I will cannonade the town, and hang every mother's son that's worth a groat on his own door-post. Go and tell him that."

"Stay," said Treslong, retaining the ferryman; "half an hour is too little—"

"No, not a moment," roared the admiral. "Half an hour, I say."

"I can scarcely reach the city in that time," said the man, "and then who will believe me when I bring your message? Have you no token?"

"Here," said Treslong, giving his signet ring; "they know *that*, at any rate. Tell them that we are landing, and shall wait one hour from this moment. Go now."

The next moment the ferryman, who could hardly retain his pleasure within bounds, was in the boat, rowing toward his own. At the foot of the ladder stood Hans, evidently waiting for him. He had no sooner reached his own boat, when Hans, leaning over to him, said:

"I say, Peter, what are you going to do?"

"Going to demand the surrender of the city," laughed Peter.

"Tell them there are *five thousand* of us," said Hans, gravely, "and two hundred and fifty cannons, and that there are as many more coming."

Koppestock nodded his head, laughing, and pulled as for his life a second time.

The stipulated hour had nearly elapsed, and the boats were busy conveying the men from the ships to the shore, where, not being averse to a change, they squatted down in companies, and regaled themselves with the little beer or wine which they had been able to scrape together.

In the meantime the admiral and such of the officers as were not employed in superintending the landing, had betaken themselves to a house not far from the shore, the inhabitants of which, probably frightened at beholding so unexpected and warlike a scene, had

fled to the city in terror, and caused the alarm of its citizens to reach its highest pitch. The whole town was in commotion. High and low, young and old, rich and poor, were standing in groups on the canals, in the streets, or on the walls, discussing the event, and the best steps to take, with eager gestures and faces upon which anxiety, dismay, or even terror were readable. For the Beggars of the Sea, thanks to the ferocity of their admirals and captains, had earned for themselves a name synonymous with desperate courage, great obstinacy, and unbounded cruelty. Many of the women were in tears, many of the men were desponding, and stood with their hands in their pockets, or assembled on the market-place, in front of the town-hall, in which the magistrates were assembled, gravely discussing the best means that could be adopted to meet the emergency. Many, too, closed their doors, and shut themselves with their families in the back apartments, where upon their knees they implored God that the hope now being kindled might not be extinguished.

While these opposite feelings of consternation and joy, of terror and hope, were being aroused in the city, there was another scene enacted in the house which we have mentioned above. In the largest room, at the head of a square deal table, sat De la Marck, his portly form resting in a clumsy chair, and a can of wine before him. Standing or sitting in different positions around the table were the leading captains of the fleet, all armed, and mostly dressed in a picturesque and fantastic style.

"As a worthy relation of him who presented the 'Request,'" said Lancelot de Brederode, a magnificent-looking young man, and a brother of the "madman," "I heartily applaud your proposal, Sir Count. Let us give no quarter to those that gave us none."

"How then," cried Adam van Haren, "would you disgrace our cause forever, by letting us commit those deeds which we pretend to abhor?"

"Abhor!" said another captain, Gillis Steltman, speaking vehemently. "Have we not sworn that we would revenge the insults

done to our countrymen, and that we would wash the stains on our banners in the blood of our tyrants? Have we then forsaken our goods, have we risked our lives, have we abandoned all hope for grace, and made our name a terror on the seas, that we should show ourselves a parcel of old women the moment we intend to do aught else but plunder a merchantman? Have you forgotten the deeds *they* have done, the blood *they* have spilled? Have you forgotten the fate of Ghent? Do you not see the streams of blood flowing at Jemmingen and at Heiliger Lee? I, for one, have sworn never to rest till every Spaniard I could lay hold on was bled to death, since I stood not a dozen yards away from the scaffold where the Counts of Egmont and Horn were executed. And if nothing else should remind me of my oath, I would still have this—"

And with a vehement and passionate gesture he dashed upon the table a cambric handkerchief, upon which large stains of a deep-red color, as of blood, were visible. A cry of sympathy went up from amongst the captains. It was a handkerchief dipped in the blood of the two nobles, Egmont and Horn, as three years ago it flowed warm and reeking out of the headless trunks.

Treslong frowned and was going to speak, when an officer named Herlijn, whose face, without nose and ears, presented a horrible spectacle, drove his dagger into the table, and said, with a tremendous oath :

"I will stop my practice for no one. If there are priests in the city, they shall know me."

His practice consisted in seizing all priests, and burning them alive, after having deprived them of their noses and ears, the same having been done some four years ago to his father, his brother, and himself, though he had escaped the burning.

"And I declare that I shall not allow such beastly cruelties to be perpetrated as long as I have a pistol with which to shoot the perpetrator," cried out Entes de Mentheda, a resolute warrior, who looked at Herlijn with flashing eyes. He was vice-admiral of the fleet, and much respected.

"Away with the priests! kill the tyrants! shoot the dogs!" cried three or four captains of Herlijn's stamp together.

"Shame! We are Protestants! We serve a noble cause! No cruelty!" cried others, who were of opposite tendency.

"Silence, gentlemen!" said De la Marck, who knew at times how to preserve his dignity; "let us consider what we have to do, and not bring our passions to our aid."

"It is not long since I had a note from the prince, Count," said Ruikhaver, "and he entreats us to use no cruelty, and not to disgrace our name."

"I would for one moment beg your attention, gentlemen," said Treslong, seizing the opportunity, and speaking calmly. "We have heard many opinions; we have listened to threats, to invectives, to passionate rehearsals of wrongs, but we have had but little advice. Gentlemen, let us remember that the eyes of our countrymen are upon us; let us remember that we are the only persons to whom they, to whom the prince, now looks for assistance. Our countrymen are weary of cruelty, they are sick of bloodshed, they abhor plunder. If our tyrants had come to us without swords, if they had executed their designs without spilling so fearful an amount of our blood, and, let it be said, of our noblest blood, I ask, Is it not probable that not half the repulsion which is now experienced would then be felt? I ask, Is it not probable that without the Inquisition, without the Blood Council, the name of Spaniards would not be half so horrible in our ears as it is. Our countrymen look around for help, they look around for those who can defend them without committing these cruelties; they acknowledge that defence, that attack, are necessary, nay, laudable, but they acknowledge, too, that revenge is unjustifiable and disgraceful. I ask you, Herlijn, How did Count Egmont win his laurels? Was it by cruelty? His name is unstained by a single drop of blood unnecessarily spilt. The prince's strict command, too, is that we should do naught but what is *laudable, honorable, and fair*. When the citizens of other towns hear that we can hold a town for the prince with-

out carnage, they will follow our example within four-and-twenty hours; but when the way we take is marked everywhere by burning houses, by mutilated corpses, and by violated women, I say that instead of doing good, we shall alike disgrace our cause and ourselves, and have no more right to pray for assistance from God than our bitterest enemies, the Spaniards."

These noble words, spoken in an impressive and earnest manner, had a great effect. Even De la Marck was affected by their truth, and allowed a discussion to take place, as to the best way to make use of the occasion. In the midst of the discussion it was announced that two deputies from the town had arrived. De la Marck, who had forgotten the stipulation he had made, bade them come in. They were the two men whom we have seen in the ferry-boat, and who were important citizens of Brill. Their companion, the clerk, a compound between a schoolmaster and a priest, had already found an opportunity to make off with himself.

It was to be expected that the deputies should address the admiral with due respect. The warlike preparations going on between the shore and the house, as well as the appearance of the assembly in which they now found themselves, heightened their respect for the Beggars; and not being able to count their forces, they fully believed the enormous exaggerations made by Koppestock. They presented to the admiral the respectful regards of the burgomaster and city of Brill, and requested that a further grace of two hours might be granted them in order to come to a unanimous conclusion how to answer the summons which had been received. That the city was by no means so defenceless as not to be able to sustain a siege of at least twenty-four hours, with some chance of success; that it was a matter of grave consideration, forasmuch as Alva had once already threatened the city with punishment, and that the fame of the Sea Beggars being well known, the citizens would far rather remain in Spanish hands, than endure all the horrors and cruelties which were said to have been perpetrated by them.

After the message had been delivered, and the deputies had gone outside, a violent discussion once more took place. But the effect of Treslong's speech remained, and those who were for hanging the parleys and rushing upon the town were overruled, the more because the landing had not yet been effected. The deputies were recalled, and informed that another two hours would be granted; that no violence of any kind would be perpetrated inside the city, and that the only object of their summons was to take the city out of Alva's hands, and place it in those of the Prince of Orange. The deputies departed astonished at the moderation and leniency of the far-famed Count de la Marck, and the captains went to superintend the finish of the landing and to get their men in readiness.

Glad that his words had had such good effects, Treslong stepped outside the house, where he was joined by De Ryk, Van Haren, De Mentheda, and others, who thanked him for his timely speech. While they were winding their way through the groups of soldiers, who were standing in the fields, or amusing themselves by skirmishing together, Treslong looked round and said:

"But where is my brave lieutenant, Yonker Galama? He has taken no part in the discussion, and I do not remember having seen him in the house."

"Nor have I, my lord," said Dé Ryk; "and if I am not mistaken, he is yonder with the soldiers of your ship and that of the admiral."

Galama approached them at that moment. His face was pale, and though calm, Treslong saw that he was inwardly excited.

"Well," he said, "are we to march at once? I have hurried all the men, but they are such lazy brutes, and talk of hunger, that I do not think they are ready yet."

"Nor need they be, Yonker," answered Treslong, "for we have two hours yet before we can do anything. So you must be patient and wait."

The Frisian frowned and stamped his foot angrily. The time, however, flew by more quickly than he had thought.

After all the men had been landed, they were reviewed by the admiral, De Mentheda, and Treslong. It was but a small party to take a town, and there was many a heart there wondering whether they would really succeed in executing their design. The two hours had not yet elapsed when some men, who had been sent out to reconnoitre, came running back, and announced that all the gates had been shut, and that most of the wealthy inhabitants were making their escape by the south gate.

"Ha!" said the admiral, with an oath; "the traitors! Now they flee, because, having spared their lives, they do not think us worth their hospitality. My Lord de Treslong, take half these men, and enter the south gate. I shall enter the north gate. We shall meet on the market-place. Forward!"

"Forward!" was the cry re-echoed by the Beggars, as they followed their leader. The first two ranks of Treslong's men were those selected by Galama, who headed them, all impatience to get inside the town.

"I say, Hans," said Peter Blink, walking beside his friend, with the tremendous sword on his shoulder; "we are going to look for Mistress Agnes, are we not? What like is she?"

"Beautiful," answered Hans, seizing his axe; "that is all I can say. And mind, when you find her do not touch her, but watch over her till either I or the Yonker come up."

"Close up! close up!" here commanded Treslong, as a troop of armed men appeared outside the gate, and seemed inclined to dispute the passage. Treslong halted for a moment, and then seeing that the party was not large, commanded an attack. The whole body fled forward, Hans and Peter first of all. But without cannon, and with only a few fire-arms, a bridge is not so easily taken, and this was found out by the Beggars.

Though there were some two hundred of them, their foremost ranks, consisting of about twenty men, had all the fighting to do. They were at first kept at a distance by the very effective fire of the three or four dozen men on the bridge. Peter Blink, brandishing his sword and laying all around him in the dust,

happened to stand on the edge of the bridge, which, as we have said in a former chapter, connected the island on which the gate stood with the ramparts. Missing his footing, he stumbled, and would have fallen into the water, had he not caught at the wood. Now Peter was very strong, and, taking advantage of his position, he swung himself along the bridge, his feet touching the water, and stood by the side of the fighting men, who in their heat did not discover him. His stratagem succeeded. He reached the island, and suddenly raising a cry of "*Vivent les Gueux!*" began to attack the Spaniards, for such they were, in the rear. In a moment all was confusion. The Spaniards, thinking they were in reality attacked behind, turned to flee. Some jumped into the fosse, some begged for quarter, some rushed upon the enemy's swords and died; and in the space of ten minutes the gate was taken.

"Now for the nunnery," cried Galama, as he waved his sword, which was dyed red with blood.

"Now for the abbess, Hans," said Peter, giving Hans a dig in the side, as if nothing had happened, and wiping his dripping weapon upon the body of a Spaniard which lay with the helmet, head, and neck split: "It's the finest piece of work I have ever done," he continued, pointing to the body. "In one blow, too. The fellow never said a word." And they ran after Galama, admiring their work.

Such is the excitement of war. In a quieter moment they would both have shuddered to have spilt that blood, or thus to mutilate a fellow-being. And Cain, too, who gave the example, when, stung with remorse, he sought in vain for a place to hide in, often wondered how he could ever have done so horrible a deed.

It was not long before the ten men were at the gate of the nunnery, and made the halls resound with the heavy blows of their axes. But the door gave no signs of opening, and, save the echo of the blows, no sound was heard within. The men redoubled their blows, but the door remained as firm as ever. Peter Blink, in the meanwhile, who had seen in the

beginning that the door could not thus be opened, and shrewd as he was, knew at once what was wanting, soon came back with a kind of petard he had obtained from the ammunition stores, which he knew were close by. Galama thanked him eagerly, and fixed it to the door with trembling hands.

"Now, then, out of the way anybody on the other side," said Hans, and set fire to the match. In a few seconds the wall shook with the report of the instrument, and the rattling doors flew out of their casement and into the gateway. The men shouted, and rushed inside, headed by Galama and Hans. Through the galleries, into the garden, into the cellars, into the church, everywhere did they flee, shouting and calling out Agnes! Maria! and knocking the walls to see whether there might be any hidden stairs; but not a soul, not a single person answered their calls. The convent was regularly cleared out. No silver, gold, or any valuables whatever were to be found.

II

Galama leaned against the gate, after he had completed his search, as pale as death, his lips compressed, and his breath coming and going heavily.

"Come, Yonker," said Hans, encouragingly, though he felt but little hope himself, "all is not lost. They may be in the town yet, for all we know."

"A poor booty we have had," said Peter Blink, coming back with a gold chain in his hand.

Galama saw it, and snatched it away. It was the chain he had first given to Gerard Block. He remembered that Maria had taken it again. He pressed it to his lips, and gave a deep sob, as a hot tear fell on his hand.

"Come, my men," he said, dashing it away, and putting the chain in his bosom. "Follow me to the market-place. There I will reward you for your trouble."

And striding at the head of his men, and battling with his deep and bitter disappointment, he left the convent.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FOUND AGAIN.

WITH a feeling as if the whole world had lost its interest for him, the Frisian, at the head of his men, stepped along the street in the direction of the large square, where stood the cathedral. The night was falling, and had already wrapped the city in a veil of dusk, which hid all but the nearest objects from view. But the city was very lively for all that. Sounds of gayety and revelry proceeded from many houses, the windows of which were thrown open, and displayed a heap of the invaders helping themselves to such of the good things of this earth as had been left by the many citizens who had employed the grant of two hours in packing all that was packable, and fleeing. Everywhere laughter and song, sometimes the clash of weapons or the sound of a quarrel, were heard, and it could be seen that the Beggars were indemnifying themselves for their late starvation.

Suddenly both Galama and Hans started. They had come in the vicinity of the town-hall, when the screams of two or more women fell upon their ears. Both of them recognized, or thought they recognized, Agnes's voice, and forgetting everything else they started off in pursuit. A few moments brought them in front of the town-hall, where an extraordinary scene awaited them. It was a large and antique building, forming one side of a square, which was used as a market-place. The square was full of Beggars, some armed with lances, others with swords and daggers, some with sticks. They seemed to enjoy themselves immensely, for every moment some burst of laughter broke out from one side of the square or another. Pushing his way through, Karel looked on and almost laughed himself. In a space encircled by Beggars, five or six stout priests, with their shaven heads and magnificent dresses, were being hustled and chased and

pulled about by the men, who considered it excellent fun, the more so that the well-sized fathers were blowing and perspiring under the weight of clothes which they had been forced to put on.

Karel saw at a glance that most of them were Van Haren's men, and inquiring from one of them where he was, he was answered that Captain van Haren and Treslong had broken into the monastery of St. Peter on the Maerlandt Square.

Now the Maerlandt Square, though it lay some distance from the town-hall, was not far from the place where they fancied they had heard the screams, and it flashed on his mind that they had just run in the wrong direction. He looked round for Hans, and not discovering him, he fled alone in the direction of the square. On the square stood the Maerlandt Church, the second Catholic church in Brill, which, though it was small and less handsome externally than the cathedral, possessed far more valuables than the other, being situated in the neighborhood of the wealthy monastery of St. Peter. When the Yonker arrived in the square, he was for a moment puzzled what to do. By the red and flaring light of torches he saw his own men busy in making the best of the inside of the church. Some had smashed the magnificently painted windows, and were standing on the sills, throwing to their companions whatever they could manage to seize. Others were running away, their arms full of silver vessels or candlesticks. One man was ludicrously arrayed in a long robe of light velvet, with golden stars sewn over it, and a bright crown of gold on his head. It had belonged to the image of the Virgin over the altar, which costly work of art now lay in the dust, broken into a hundred pieces.

Suddenly it occurred to the Frisian that Treslong's house, or rather that of his late father, stood in the square, and directing his steps thither, he was soon able to recognize it. A flood of light came through a parting in the curtain that was drawn before the window, and as he fled up the steps and into the hall, which was full of his own men, who were conveying their booty thither, he heard Treslong's voice giving the toast :

"The Prince, the Beggars, and the Independence of the Netherlands."

Just as he opened the door of the room from which the sound seemed to come, the toast received uproarious applause. It was a large room, magnificently furnished and lighted, and round a long, square table some twenty men were standing with uplifted goblets, responding to the toast with enthusiasm. An ample repast was on the table. No sooner had Galama entered than he was perceived by some of the party, and a shout of "Galama forever" replaced their first cries. Not feeling in a mood to partake of their gayety, he turned back to leave the room; but the men, among whom we find our acquaintance Van Hagendorp, seized him, and carried him forcibly to the head of the table, where Treslong stood, wondering what the noise might be.

"This is the man who had the first idea of it, gentlemen," cried Van Hagendorp; "let us drink a bumper to his health and that of the beautiful nun he is looking for."

Karel, who had put the cup to his lips almost against his will, paused and looked at the speaker. The assembled noblemen greeted him with laughter; but Treslong, who understood his secret and pitiful look better, whispered to him, "She is safe."

The bumper was emptied in a moment, and another quickly followed it. The wine did him good, and the color returned to his pale cheek.

"By all that's impudent," now cried one of the guests at the window, "here are our men plundering the church, and we getting nothing of it." In a moment he opened the

door and ran outside, followed by most of the others.

"I shall not let you wait any longer, Yonker," said Treslong, stepping to a door; "but I must say that but for that fellow Peter Blink and myself, your mistress might have fared worse even than you expected. Here she is."

He opened the door, and Karel entered the next room. On a kind of sofa two women and a man were conversing together, and one of the women, as soon as she saw Galama's tall form enter the room, threw herself into his arms, regardless of Treslong or her two companions, who were none else than Sister Anne and Wouter Barends.

"And Maria?" asked Galama, after their first burst of joy.

"She is in heaven," answered Agnes; "she is happy now, and out of her troubles. She suffered a great deal."

"And have you not suffered a great deal?" asked her lover, looking tenderly at her thin and pale cheeks; for the treatment in the convent had at last robbed her of her roses.

"I suffered but little, my Karel," she answered, softly; "and most of that for you. What I underwent for Jesus' sake was to me no suffering; for I bore it gladly. And I know that the heaviest part of Maria's suffering was the conviction within her that she had refused the cross which God gave her to bear. She loved Him, and with her it was only a weakness of the flesh, but it haunted her so terribly that I am certain, had her denial gained her access to the greatest honors, wealth, or pleasure, she would have revolted from their very sight."

"And is it not the same with us, Agnes?" said he. "Would not my life have been blighted had I offended you, and renounced you for aught in this world—you who have made me understand what it is to serve so great a Master? Ah, Agnes, these years have not been without use. They have served to develop within me the seed which you have sown, and," he added, bending his head down to her, "they have strengthened our love towards each other and towards Him."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

"COME, Yonker," said Treslong, next day, as he entered the same apartment, where Galama was alone with Agnes; "we must be stirring. The admiral goes on like a madman. He wants to leave the city and return to sea, and leave the town as it is. We must induce him to remain, for I am certain that within a week we shall be besieged; and if we can keep the place for the prince, it will be the greatest thing we have done yet. De la Marck has already been hanging several priests, because they refused to show him some hidden treasures, which I do not suppose they possessed."

"I saw some priests ill-treated yesterday," said Galama, "and did I not hear you scream, Agnes?"

"I know I screamed," she answered, and then told him shortly how she had been released out of the clutches of that monster. "And to my great delight," she added, "I found Barends here, whom I prayed to go and look for Anne. He found her in the convent, nobody having troubled himself about her."

"Good Barends," said Treslong, with a smile; "he actually prayed me to lend him some soldiers, that he might go to the house of Van Alphen, the corn-merchant, and defend it. Unfortunately Van Alphen has left Brill these four years, it seems, so his services were not required. But as to your assailant, Mistress Vlossert, he has suffered for his insolence. It was that brute Herlijn. Thanks to Peter Blink, he is since dead."

At this moment cries of "Sanglier, Orange!" were heard in the street, and a troop of Beggars rushed past the window. Fearing that something had gone wrong, Karel and Treslong snatched up their arms, ran into the street, and directed their steps to De la Marck's headquarters. It was nothing, how-

ever, but a carouse of some intoxicated fellows.

They found De la Marck raving like a veritable wild boar. He would hang every Roman Catholic in the town, he would burn it, pull down the walls and sail away. And as he stormed and swore, he pointed with a satisfied grin to the bodies of four priests, who had been hanged within his sight, dressed in all the pomp of their vocation. The same scene, which had been enacted in the house between the town and the shore, was enacted again with but little variation. At last the admiral gave in, and ordered all hands to join in strengthening the walls, and dragging guns out of the arsenal. Nor was this at all superfluous. Within a week, Bossu, a Spanish general, arrived before the town with ten companies of regular troops, and demanded the keys of the city.

On a part of the wall, not far from the northern gate, and almost at the back of the house of the late baroness, we find De la Marck, Treslong, Galama, and the principal officers, in serious deliberation; for to judge by the number of ships which the enemy had brought, they numbered between one and two thousand men, and the garrison of Brill was not more than five hundred. It is true, immediately after it became known that the Beggars of the Sea had taken Brill, many fugitives and favorers of the prince had joined them, and swelled their number; still they had as yet but a small force. Behind these officers we find a group of common soldiers, who are looking at the Spanish ships, from which the men are disembarking; and amongst them we notice our old acquaintances, Hans, Peter Blink, and Dirk, the former servant of Van Alphen.

"Dash it all!" says Dirk, "I would not mind going out to them."

"And get beaten," said Hans. "Do you not see that there are about five times our number?"

"Bad job," growled Peter Blink, hacking the point of his axe in a tree.

"Tell you what," says Dirk again, "if you will lend me that axe of yours, Master Blink, I undertake to swim across to the Newland sluice, yonder. I was one of the men who made it, and I know I can get it loose in three blows, and all these Spaniards will be drowned."

It was a happy idea, and Hans at once communicated it to Galama, who proposed it to the admiral. A few moments later Dirk shouldered the axe, and plunging into the moat swam across. Arrived at the other side he ran to the sluice, and a few moments afterwards the water poured through, almost carrying him along with it. It was not long ere the Spaniards found out what had been done. That part of the land which lay between the dyke on the Meuse and the dyke which led to the southern gate was in a few minutes under water, which continued to rise every moment. The Spaniards retreated on the dyke, and waited until all should have disembarked.

"They are following our example, my lord," said Roobol; "we left nobody behind, and had no guns."

"Ay," said Galama, "and it struck me then that we were acting very foolishly; for had there been a garrison, part of it could easily have cut the anchors of our ships, and sent them adrift."

"Suppose we do it now," said Treslong; "our boats are here."

The three men looked at each other, and smiled. The next moment, ever ready to execute a new idea, they had called their men, and were running to the harbor.

"A thousand ducats for the first boat that reaches them," cried Treslong.

"Come along, Peter," said Hans, dragging the dwarf behind him. They were followed by Dirk and four others, and leaping into their boat, so that it was almost swamped, they pushed off just as Galama, with a desperate leap, gained the back seat, and took the helm.

"They cannot row against us, can they, Peter?" said Hans, pulling at his oar.

"Right," growled Peter, pulling also.

It was an exciting race of the four boats on the Meuse, rowing to do a daring deed, under a cross-fire of jokes and laughter.

Galama's boat was the first to reach the vessels, some ten in number, on which but a few seamen had been left behind. Ten times their number would not have been able to oppose the rush of the Beggars as they climbed about the ships, and immediately began cutting the anchors, the rigging, and the sails. Suddenly a sharp report of muskets was heard from the city, and, pausing in their work, they saw the Spaniards led on to the walls by Bossu, where they were received by a murderous fire.

"To the boats, lads, at once," cried Galama rushing on deck from the cabin of the ship which they had reached. His orders were obeyed, and hardly had they left the vessel when, with a fearful crash, part of the deck flew off, and a column of smoke and flames rose up in the air. Galama had followed Sextus's example, and set fire to the powder. It was followed by the others, and in a little time half of the ships were on fire.

"To the boats! the Spaniards are coming back," cried Treslong.

The boats were soon gained, and as they pulled away they could see the Spaniards wading along the dyke through the water, which had meanwhile risen above it. The enemy had not bargained for so warm a reception, and were completely staggered. After having been led on twice to the charge, and been defeated, they fled in disorder. The danger was surmounted, the city of Brill belonged to the Prince of Orange, and the first important exploit of the eighty years' war had been effected.

The effect which the taking of Brill had upon the people of the Netherlands was electric. It was as if the sun had suddenly shone in full lustre through a black and threatening cloud. City after city proclaimed for the prince; town after town chased the Spanish garrison out of its walls. Treslong, at the head of a part of the men,

set but for Flushing, and took it in the name of the prince. Not long afterwards an officer was sent by the prince, holding a commission as lieutenant-governor of the Island of Walcheren, the first nook where the standard of liberty was unfurled. How for a time the Spaniards almost crushed the renewed outburst of patriotism, how at last it triumphed, despite all the Spanish empire could do, how the Netherlands, after a war of eighty years, became independent, and at last gained that freedom of worshipping God which was their main desire, we leave hereafter to be related. For the present we take leave of our readers, after giving them one little scene as farewell.

In the room of Treslong's house on the Maerlandt Square, where Galama had found Agnes, we find the couple, Barends, Sister Anne, Treslong, and Hans together. It is the evening of the day on which the Beggars of the Sea are going to depart.

"And are you really going to leave us?" asked Anne, as she looked at Galama.

"What else can I do, sweet nun?" answered he with a forced gayety. "The real fight is only now beginning. But let Agnes decide."

Poor Agnes, who had been sitting motionless, here burst into tears, but forcing them back, she tried to smile, and said with a sob, "Go, Karel."

"I have another plan, Yonker," said Treslong, kindly. "You know I have just come from Flushing, where I have seen the lieutenant-general, 't Zerearts. He asked me whom I could recommend as a good gov-

ernor for Brill, and it struck me that you would not be a bad one—"

"O my lord!" here cried Agnes, falling before him and kissing his hand.

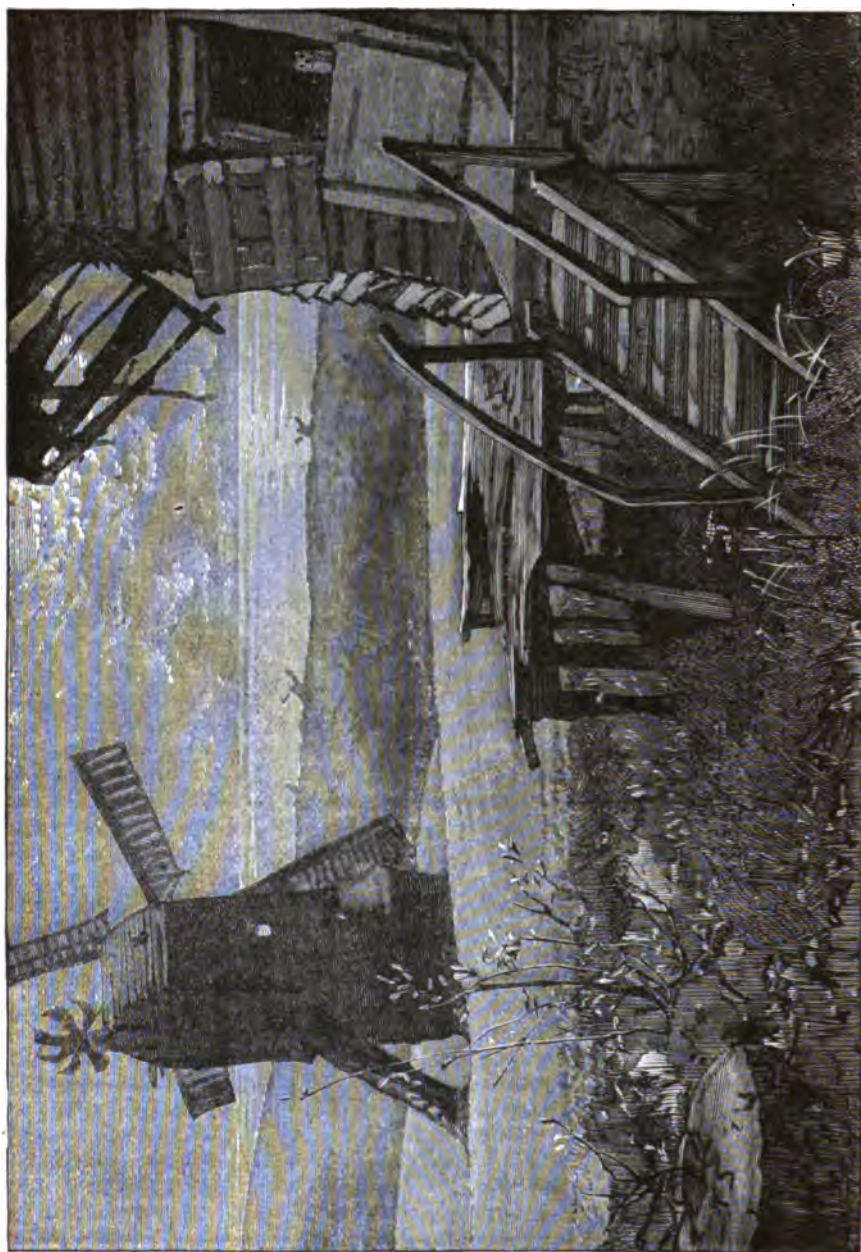
"One moment, madam," said the seaman, smiling, "this is not all. You know your boat, Yonker, was first, and consequently I owe you a thousand ducats."

"That's my doing," whispered Hans, contentedly stroking his beard.

"As, however, I have but little ready money on hand, I thought I might give it to you in valuables. This house belongs to my family. It was the residence and property of the old governor, my father; let it be so of the new. Let me congratulate you as the new governor of Brill. I know none more worthy to fill that post, as I never knew any one whom I loved and respected so much; and were it not that you have so great an attraction here," he added, at the same time bowing to Agnes, "I would never part with you."

Within a week of this scene, Agnes and Karel were married in the Maerlandt Church by Wouter Barends, and conducted in triumph to their new house by half the Beggars, whose departure had been purposely postponed, though De la Marck had already sailed with the other half.

That their marriage was a happy one will scarcely be doubted; and their happiness was all the greater because Wouter Barends lived with them, and openly preached the reformed doctrines, no longer in the barn of Van Alphen, but in the cathedral.



"THE HIGH MILLS."

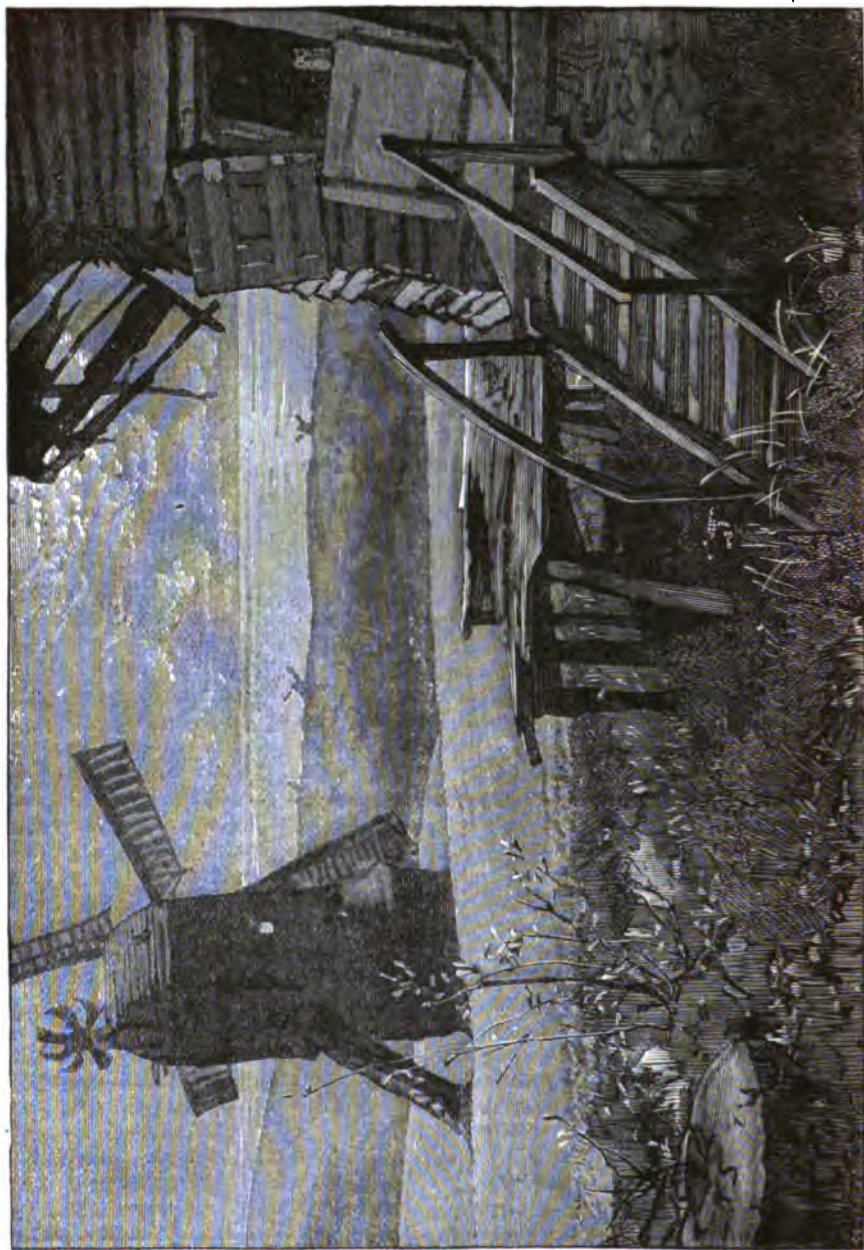
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THE HIGH MILLS.

CHAPTER I.



HERE is a turn in the road from Bulver's Bay to Lamberhurst from which the High Mills are first to be seen, looking like two pinned insects writhing on the hill.

It was at this turn of the road that Michael Swift first saw them at

noon on the third day of his journey. He stood still, his bundle on his stick, his face raised towards them, with the look of a man seeing at last in substance and reality what had been his chief vision awake or asleep, for years past.

It was such a look as Jacob might have cast upon the fields of Laban, Christian on the shining palaces of the Beautiful City, or Columbus towards the shores of the New World.

When he withdrew his eyes from the mills, Michael turned to look at the road by which he had come ; and, dropping his bundle, took his stick and drew a little line across the road, saying to himself with a smile as full of sorrow as tears can sometimes be of joy, "Here my life is cut in two."

On one side of the line lay Michael's thirty-two years of peaceful, honest life, all darkened now by the great sorrow which had driven him forth ; on the other remained only the High Mills and the hope which was too wild and daring to be told to any living creature, but for the sake of which he had left all he cared for in the world.

Michael had changed his travelling clothes at the last village that he passed, and was going into Lamberhurst in his white miller's dress. He was of middle height and broad-shouldered, and possessed all the vigour and careless grace of well-used muscles and per-

fect health. His face, too, was broad, and always pale ; and this and his dark beard and eyes gave him a slightly Eastern look, which, however, was forgotten at the first sound of his hearty English voice.

Everything he saw was as fresh to him as if he had indeed entered upon a new world, a new life. He had never before been more than twelve miles from London ; and this old village in Southdownshire, where life was still much the same as it had been a century ago, was full of wonder for him.

He laughed at the fat-legged children running into the cottages at his approach. He marvelled at the little Norman church, at its rich black old door, guarded with rustic white gates, which would have been thought too humble for the lowest cottage in his village. He went on a few steps into the churchyard, which was treeless and breezy, and where there was about one gravestone to twenty little mounds without. "Are folks here content to be buried, name and all?" Michael wondered ; and he thought that if he grew old and died before his hope was realised, it would be better that he too should have his name go down into the grave with him.

As he was thinking of this his eyes fell on a stone bearing many repetitions of the name "Ambray ;" and Michael no sooner saw it than his face became disturbed ; a deep reverence came over it, and he took his cap slowly and with trembling hands from his head.

The first tracing of the name was fast following the bones of its owner to decay, but Michael could just read underneath it "of Lamberhurst Hall." There was next a John Ambray, of Lamberhurst Hall, then some names which Michael passed quickly over till he came to that of a captain who had distinguished himself at Waterloo, and from this to the soldier's eldest son, George Ambray, of Buckholt Farm.

As he read this name, Michael bowed his head lower, and turned quickly away, treading gently in the grass, on which his eyes were fixed with a gravity as profound as if each green blade marked some dust dear to him.

The smell of wood fires came stronger on the fresh March breeze, and soon Michael reached the little inn by the sign of the Team, where he entered and asked for some ale.

The lad to whom he had spoken pointed into the little bar-parlour, where Michael had

already seen four or five smock-frocks round a table, and a tanglement of drab-gaitered legs underneath it.

It was market-day, and the heads of several of the neighbouring farms having gone to the town, the company in which Michael found himself was, he soon understood, composed mostly of old men who had been left at home in charge; and who had taken this opportunity of a quiet meeting and discussion of their several grievances, in the presence of the sympathising landlord of the Team.

Michael had never seen anything like these men in his life before. They all stopped talking as he sat down at the window, and stared at him, exchanged looks with each other, then stared at him again with as little regard for what he thought of it as if he had been a stray animal wandering at large in the village.

Michael returned their gaze with more than the surprise natural to a townsman meeting farm-labourers of a remote country place for the first time. An innocent prisoner, seeing impotent age or idiocy on his judge's face, might have had such a look of foreboding—almost terror—as came into Michael's eyes at the contemplation of these creatures of his new world.

Turning away from them to the window, he saw a boy running past, then heard heavy shoes in the passage, and in an instant a little smock stood in the doorway, and a small voice, full of excitement, was shouting—

"Ma'r S'one! The mill's agoing!"

At this every one looked at a little old man at a corner of the table.

Michael looking also, saw that Ma'r S'one (which he afterwards heard was a Southdownshire abbreviation of Master Stone) was quite different from the rest of the company, who had impressed him so unfavourably.

Ma'r S'one was very small and gentle-looking, and seemed to be almost visibly diminishing in size, under the influence of age and toil. His tanned hand shook on his knee like a dry leaf in autumn longing to flutter down and be at rest. His little eyes were bright, and ever ready to fill with childish surprise, or dismay, or pleasure—indeed, Ma'r S'one was very like a withered child looking gently on life as on a hard school, from which he waited patiently to be sent home. Afterwards, when Michael had much opportunity of watching him, he noticed that he never seemed quite at his ease, but appeared constantly haunted by the fear that he was not doing all that he could to please people, and might get into trouble. No one could ever

persuade Ma'r S'one that any portion of his time belonged to himself. His presence now at the Team was quite a piece of self-sacrifice, for Ma'r S'one drank nothing but water, and hated to leave his work, but he had been much too frightened at giving offence to refuse to go with those who had demanded his company. "All things to all men" was Ma'r S'one—but most innocently, and for nothing but peace.

When the boy called out that the mill was going, and every one looked at Ma'r S'one, his little eyes filled with astonishment, and gazed about helplessly. At last he fixed them on the boy, and asked—

"Be ye sure, Tum?"

"Ye'es," answered Tom, jerking his head back to look through the outer door—"goin' a good'n! Come and look 'eself, Ma'r S'one."

So Ma'r S'one got up, and leaning on his long-handled thud (for without some such aid he could not walk), and jerking his shoulder-blades as if he found it difficult to realise that they were not burthened with a bundle of sticks or hay, he went to the door and stood beside the boy, looking out up at the mills.

Michael watched him as he looked up with bright wondering eyes, which presently grew full of childish awe.

He came back shaking his head, and said in a trembling voice as he sat down—

"Poor old Ambray! I thart missis 'ud wuk 'im up to it—I thart she woard."

Michael, who sat holding his mug of ale without heeding it, and looking on the floor as he listened intently, heard several grunts of sympathy; and some one asked—

"Ah she's been at it agen, then, eh, Ma'r S'one?"

"Ye'es," said Ma'r S'one; "I fetched her a sheert o' paper yest'y, and she writ to him un she must and woard let the mill, as he couldn't wuk it 'e'self nor pay a grinder. And then she carled me in, and I see her a lickin' it to make it steeik, and a thumpin' it, and she scaaled the name on it and says to me, 'Take this 'ere up to t' High Mills, Ma'r S'one, and look shearp.' I wur most afeard to go, I wur."

"The old flint might tark her 'ead arf afore she'd got me to gone," asserted a voice at the table.

Ma'r S'one looked at the speaker with the humble admiration with which a weak little boy looks at a school-fellow of superior size, and repeated meekly—

"I wur most afeard to go; and when I heerd old Ambray's cough, I thart I shud a

tarned and gone down t'hill agen; but if I had, she'd comed 'e'self. So I gived it in, and they telled me bide a minute, and I heerd him fell off his cheer a coughin' and a chokin', and the wife wur on her knees holdin' up his 'ead and cryin', and says to me, 'Go, Ma'r S'one, there's no good to wait. Tell the missus John Ambray is old and helpless, but he has a son, and we have sent for him.'"

Michael had turned his back, and was looking up at the mills with wild eyes and white lips.

"It's beh oped you telled her that, Ma'r S'one," said the landlord of the Team.

"Ye'es," answered Ma'r S'one; "she wur jest arf in the caart—she and Ann Ditch—with th' butter under 'em, and she on'y larfed when I telled her, and says, 'Arl very fine, Ma'r S'one, but la's la', and right's right.'"

"But it beant all la' that's right, naythur," said an old man sitting next to Ma'r S'one.

Michael did not stay to hear the slow and complicated dispute which followed this bold assertion, but paid for his ale, and nodding gently to Ma'r S'one as the representative of the company, wished him good morning, and went out.

Though it was but one by the Dutch clock as Michael left the Team, Lamberhurst had sunk deep into its afternoon stupor.

Time dragged such a rusty and reluctant scythe over these downs of which Michael's new world consisted, that it is no wonder the inhabitants found it necessary to take him by the forelock to get on at all. So at three or four in the morning, the working day began; and who then could wait later than eleven for the noon, or seven or eight for night? Time, however, kept a strict reckoning with those who tried to beguile him in this way, and got what was due to him by stretching out the weary lives a score or so of years beyond the usual length. Sitting in the doorways, or crawling with sticks and crutches along the little passages, or peering from the windows, Michael saw several of these aged debtors whom the tyrant would not suffer to depart till they had paid what they owed him to the uttermost farthing.

At the smithy, by the steep lane leading up to the High Mills, the horse that was being shod, the smith who was beating the red-hot shoe, the two men looking on, and the fire itself, with the March sunshine on it, all seemed to Michael to be more than half asleep.

The ducks about the pond apparently thought there was at this hour nothing in

water requiring the attention of more than one eye, or on earth that made it worth standing on with more than one leg. The calves brought down to drink had fallen into a trance with their mouths full of water, which dribbled back into the pond, while the shadows of the overhanging catkins fell lightly on their sleek sides.

Michael Swift, as he strode through the village in his miller's clothes, every muscle and nerve of his body strung to action, and his face worn by sorrow and full of fervour, looked not unlike some white-robed messenger of fate coming with hands full of good and evil to waken this lethargic little world.

CHAPTER II.

ALTHOUGH that lane to the High Mills was to become to Michael's feet as familiar a way as they had ever trodden, he remembered noticing nothing about it then but that it was steep and chalky, and seemed to end in a sharp line against the sky.

He had not gone far up before the wind which had lulled a few moments rose high, and suddenly he heard the grinding of the millstone and the rushing of the sails.

He had been expecting this sound ever since he set foot in the lane, listening for it, yet it came upon him with a tumult that bewildered and staggered him. He listened to it as one piloting a ship through perilous ways listens to the breaking of the waves upon a reef, his lips hard set, his eyes contracted, to prevent either breath or glance betraying the fear that is in him.

Michael could not keep his feet steady; his steps wavered from side to side of the narrow road. The higher he got, the more overwhelming to him became the voice of the little mill, which as yet he could not see. It was eloquent of things he dared not think of at this time. It filled the stark black hedges with visions of a face from which his own turned shudderingly away. It was in vain that his will strove against his imagination, which clutched at everything the mill's voice offered it—the vision of a little child laughing and clapping its hands at the sails turning merrily in the spring breeze—a lad's face at a mill window looking out upon the morning, flushed like itself with the hectic beauty of false promise—these, and many others such as these, Michael's fancy seized upon as the sound of the mill filled his ears.

At last something white came flashing up over the hill-line and against the vivid March sky.

The tips of the mill-sails were in sight, sweeping slowly round, for the wind had sunk.

Now that Michael was so near to what he had been journeying towards for three days, the energy died out of his limbs, so that he could scarcely drag them along; the whole journey began to appear to him a foolish and desperate thing.

He could see all the top of the mill now—the little sails opposite the great ones, and a tiny window.

A few steps more, and the whole scene he had so often pictured was before him—not as he had pictured it, but all strange—so strange, that old thoughts, which had grown half-lovingly, half-fearfully round Michael's picture, fled; and, before new ones had time to grow and fit themselves, there was nothing in his mind but dreariness, confusion, and a desire that was really a sharp pain after the home left—a bitter sense that the smallest thing *there*, in the place hidden from him by a three days' journey, was nearer and clearer to his perception at this moment than all which lay close before him.

He had thought of the two mills in a pleasant country field—the white one trim and orderly, and the old black mill beyond it, useless and falling to decay; but little had he imagined what kind of world they stood in—what valley crowned with a shining little circlet of sea lay stretched before them—green, plenteous, and so lovely as to be strange and foreign to eyes which had seen no farther than poor Michael Swift's. So as he looked on it his eyes grew heavy and sick; like a poor soldier's which, filled with the loved face he has left behind him, are compelled to look upon the smiles and gestures of some dancing peasant girl.

But this was no time to pause and give way to the bitterness of being a stranger in the land. The wind came up from the sea, and the voice of the mill aroused him. He looked up at it. How gaunt it was and weather-worn! How impossible he found it to look at the little windows without seeing the same face at each—the fresh boyish face with eyes blue and careless—that *would* meet his and kindle with tragic prophecy as they gazed at him.

Suddenly a real face appeared at the little square window of the grinding-floor. Not the face that had been haunting Michael since the mill had been in hearing and in sight. This face was aged, long, white, and stern, and with no colour in it but the cold steel-grey eyes which looked out beyond where

Michael Swift was standing right on to where the road from Bulver's Bay curved low among the downs.

Michael understood well the meaning of the look, and moved aside, because he could not bear to stand even unseen between it and its guest.

In moving he went towards the mill, which was going now with a velocity that reminded him how unfit perhaps to regulate its speed were the hands trying so feverishly to save and keep it from passing away from them.

At this thought Michael lifted his head and pressed on towards the mill door, with a tender pity in his face like one who hastens to the assistance of a child in distress or danger.

He went straight and opened the door, but when he stood inside among the sacks of flour, with the name of Ambray on them, and saw some feet coming down the little ladder from the dressing-floor, his confusion and dizziness came back, and he scarcely knew how he should face the tall white figure that was coming slowly down to him.

He was holding his hand to his side and coughing as he came, though Michael saw this rather than heard it because of the din of the grindstone, which drowned every other sound.

His grey eyes were fixed on Michael, whom he had seen approaching, and had come down to meet. He was very tall, and still upright in spite of his illness, which had left him white as the deal shaft he held by as he stood still at the foot of the steps. Michael could not tell if his hair was really white, for it was covered with flour, as were his eyebrows and lashes.

Michael could not speak; he moistened his lips and moved them, but no sound came through the noise of the grindstone.

The long ghostly figure holding by the shaft and coughing his painful and, as it seemed, silent cough, began to wonder at him, and the grey eyes to gather some impatient fire.

"The—the master?" Michael said at last, with a voice which he felt might ruin him, but which the miller thought strong and pleasant enough.

He nodded sharply, and Michael's hand went to his cap. Then the old man shouted above the din—

"And servant too." And at this Michael took his cap right off and held it in his hand.

The miller stared at him, but not so sternly; for respect is sweet to those who have had it, and lost or think that they have lost it.

The wind was gentler now, and Michael

had no trouble in hearing his own voice and making it heard when he said—

"I heard you were without a grinder, and I have come to offer myself."

The old miller looked at him in a way that made Michael's heart beat high with hope.

This was not because he saw in that look the least intention on the miller's part of engaging a grinder, he knew well nothing was further from him than any such purpose; but Michael could see that his proposal had disturbed the old man with what he himself felt to be a vain desire for that which he must refuse. Michael knew that as he looked at him he was considering his strength, and hopelessly longing that it might have been in his power to use it for the saving of the mill; he knew that he was thinking of the services he offered, and coveting them with all his soul and with all his poor weary body that longed to give up struggling against its chains of pain, and lie down to lessen their weight.

Reading all this with those simple clear-seeing eyes of his, Michael did not despair when the miller said—

"I am not in need of a grinder. Who told you I was? I do not employ one. I manage the stone and everything myself."

"So I heard," answered Michael, avoiding the haggard eye, and fixing his own on the name on a flour sack against the great scales. "But I heard, too, that there was like to be some change in your arrangements just now."

Ambray coughed painfully. The thought of what the change might be—the giving up of the mill—had made him tremble as he stood.

"No," he answered shortly. "No change that will make me engage a grinder."

"This person that was talking to me about it," said Michael, "was thinking you were likely to be making a fresh start altogether to put a stop to some change that was talked of about the mill. I don't know the rights of it exactly; but this friend of mine was saying that he was sure you would see that it would be the best thing you could do now to hire a grinder at once."

The miller gave Michael a bewildered and an astonished look, then bent his white brows in thought—painful and puzzled.

"No," he said at last, looking up with decision; "I don't think of doing any such thing."

Michael took his cap from under his arm, but instead of putting it on, as Ambray expected to see him do, turned it about in his hands thoughtfully.

"You'll excuse me," he began, looking up suddenly at the tall old miller, "if I take the liberty of mentioning that I know you couldn't—I mean that it would make no difference to me putting off the matter of wages for a few weeks or so."

Old Ambray did not answer, but stood looking at him through and through.

"Now," thought Michael, "he thinks I have got into some scrape, and want to earn a character at his expense." He put his hand into his pocket, and taking out a little old leather case, drew from that a paper which he gave to Ambray.

This was the written character Michael Swift had received from the manager of some mills he had worked at for five years.

"What is this?" asked Ambray, opening it as he spoke.

"I should like you to look at it," answered Michael, "in case you change your mind."

The miller read it through and returned the paper to Michael, repressing a sigh as he did so.

"Yes," he said, looking at him with more interest. "These are good lines—very good lines. You ought to get a good thing from these. These are famous mills too—I have heard of them. My son—I have a son in London—wrote to me about them."

Michael never afterwards understood what impelled him to look up at that instant, and meet the miller's eye, and give that little answering nod as the old man said, "I have a son in London." He has often felt it since to be one of the greatest sins he ever committed.

While Michael was hanging his head and suffering over this little involuntary act, Ambray was regarding him with a certain wistfulness in his wan eyes, and asking himself, "What does he mean—this well-to-do-looking fellow, with his good lines, coming to my mill when he might go anywhere? I take it he is not quite sharp."

Then he thought, "Perhaps he has come to Southdownshire to see after some important place that will take some weeks to settle about, and only wants to fill up the time."

And here Michael saw that he again began thinking how well it would be for him if he could by any possibility agree to his proposal.

"Why have you come down here, so far from where you worked before?" inquired Ambray suddenly.

If Michael was for a moment at a loss for a reply, the miller did not perceive it, for his cough came on through his having spoken more quickly than Michael had yet heard

him speak ; and by the time the fit was over Ambray was conscious of having received a simple and satisfying reason for Michael's presence at Lamberhurst. It was something about his having half arranged to engage himself at a steam mill near Bulver's Bay, but that finding there would be more night-work than he cared to undertake, he had given up the idea altogether.

The fit of coughing had so exhausted and depressed Ambray, that sinking on the sack of bran Michael had pushed near to him, he fell into a fit of gloomy thought, and appeared to forget Michael's presence, and to remember nothing but his weakness and the many troubles that lay so heavily upon him.

The sunshine streamed in under the door and through the little window all clogged with flour as with an indoor snow, and to make the mimicry of winter more complete, a robin came and clung to the window-frame, pressing its scarlet breast against it in its efforts to peck at a flake of bran sticking to the inside of the window. The old black mill-dog got up from the corner, where he had been eyeing Michael ever since he entered, and came and licked his hand with a glance of stolid and decided friendliness.

As Michael patted him, the feeling that he should stay took hold of him very strong y.

At this moment a little bell high up in the mill began to ring with a weak tinkling sound that was scarcely heard above the other noise. It was the bell that was struck by the machinery when there was no more corn in the shoot over the grindstone.

Michael, having been used to the same arrangement in the mills where he worked, was half-way up the steps before he remembered where he was.

He paused and looked back hesitatingly.

"Where are you going?" asked Ambray gruffly.

"There's the child crying, as we call it in our mills," answered Michael with a smile ; "shan't I go and feed it?"

"Let it cry," Ambray said, beginning to cough ; "leave it alone."

Michael paused on the ladder with brows lifted in surprise.

"Isn't that a pity?" he remonstrated ; "the wind's getting steady now. I shall find some corn on the shooting-floor, shan't I? I'm a good nurse, master ; I can't bear to hear the child cry and not go and feed it. I shall find my way."

"Let it cry, I tell you!" shouted Ambray, "and come down with you." As Michael obeyed, the old man, touched perhaps by

the gentleness of his steps and look, added bitterly—

"Let it cry. Let it be hungry. Let it starve. I have no more to feed it with. No ; there's no corn on the shooting-floor, there is no corn in the mill. Be off, my man. I like you, but you've come to the wrong shop. Go your ways with your good lines, and luck attend you."

CHAPTER III.

In his heart the old miller did not take it ill that Michael, instead of obeying him, remained standing by the ladder ; looking as if all the shame of the confession lay with him for having been the means of bringing it out.

"I won't deceive you, master," he said at last ; "I guessed something of this before."

"Then why the—then, what do you mean by wanting to be my grinder?"

"Why not?" said Michael. "For one thing, I don't take all I pick up here and there for gospel truth, specially in the country, where folk must have something to keep them from stagnating. And then, too, the thought came to me, that perhaps if this lady that owns the mill and sells you the corn, if she heard you'd a good, strong, steady-going sort of grinder, she might be willing to leave things as they are a little longer, to give us a trial."

The miller mused over this profoundly, and studied Michael from head to foot.

"I thought that was her reason for wishing to put the mill in other hands, your keeping no man, and—and not having good health yourself?" Michael ventured to add, after a silence of some moments.

"Reason—her reason!" said Ambray, with a wrathful light gathering in his eyes. "It's no use going into that. The truth is, the woman wants to get the thing out of my hands altogether, if she can—if she can. But while I keep the mill in use, I have a sort of right to it ; but that's nothing to do with you. As for what you say, I don't know but what there's something in it—in fact, I do see something in it."

He sat thinking, pressing the fingers of either hand to his temples, which Michael could see were still throbbing with the agitation of his last coughing fit.

"Well," he said, rising up to his full height, and taking hold of the shaft, "there can be no harm done by trying what you have proposed—it's not a bad proposal—not at all. I can't see the woman to-day ; she's never home till late on market-days, and if she were," he added to himself reflectively,

"it's a chance if she'd be sober. No; we'll go in the morning,—that's if you really think you care to waste your time over the experiment."

"Why, what can I do better?" answered Michael, trying to speak only cheerfully, and to conceal his deep thankfulness.

"I can give you a good bed," said Ambray, with the faded light of a bygone hospitality in his eyes. "And, though there's no corn in the mill, there's bread in the house. Come—come home and see my wife."

Michael's eyes fell with a reluctant look. Then, as if a thought had suddenly come to his assistance, he glanced round the little room and shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me, master, the mistress would do right to send me back with a box on the ear if I leave such a place as this," he protested. "Look how that window is choked up—the brush must go to work here at once, or we shan't be able to see one pollard from another soon, or bran from sharps."

"Nonsense," grumbled Ambray, who did not like being opposed, and whose cough was aggravated by Michael's brush filling the air with white dust. "I'm going home to tea. You'd better come too."

Michael made a grimace.

"Tea, master?" he remonstrated, "before three o'clock! Come now, you must have a little patience with me. I shall get used to your country hours all in good time, and turn the day upside down as well as any of you. I've no doubt in a week or two you'll find me quite ready to spring up like a lark—no, I mean like a nightingale when the sun sets, and go to bed when the lark gets up. But who *can* be reformed all at once?"

"Have your own way, then," answered the miller, a smile playing for an instant on his thin white lips as Michael held open the door for him.

CHAPTER IV.

LIKE some churchyard ghost, Michael thought, that had gone wandering abroad at midnight and been overtaken by the sunshine before it had found its way back to the grave, the figure of the miller, tall and white, passed slowly across the corner of the sunny field.

He stood with the door in his hands for some moments looking after him with a gaze that had in it the tenderness of a child, the awe of a slave.

Then he shut the door gently, as gently and reluctantly as if some bright form, soft,

odour-breathing, and lovely, had just floated out, and he feared that the edges of a silken train might still be lingering on the threshold.

With his thumb upon the latch, he turned and looked around him, and up the little steps, and slowly realised that he was alone in the mill.

He realised that he was alone, and yet his eyes began immediately to look and turn slowly or quickly as eyes that are riveted on the movements of some person or thing whose presence causes restlessness and fear. The invisible object of Michael's gaze was felt by him to be anything but ghostly. The face and form that he felt living and moving about the mill were full of vigour and youth, and indeed it was the richness and fulness of life in his spectre that made it the more terrible to him. Many times he had the sense of hearing a clear strong whistle, or a snatch of song in a rich, young voice that seemed now in the room where he was, now above in the upper floors, and now upon the steps. When at last Michael's gay and busy ghost seemed to him to have passed up these steps, and to be moving about the dressing floor over his head, he could not keep himself from following.

Ascending the steps slowly, he reached this place, and gazed through the dusty glass door into the tiny closet that served as an office.

There was a little white coat which Michael knew could never have belonged to old Ambray hanging up here, and nailed against the wall he saw a tiny common looking-glass which he was sure was never hung there by the grim old miller.

Turning from the office, he was passing along by the great flour-bin in the middle of the room, when he saw on it in a patch of sunshine a confused mass of sketches and scribbling. The sketches were mostly of windmills, and all seemed to have been done by the same hand, which had evidently been possessed by a restless ambition to improve upon its first childish sketch of a windmill. In the top sketch it seemed to have fulfilled its desires, for a fantastic frame was pencilled round it, and just inside the frame was written, in a hand bold and flowing, "George Ambray."

The scribbling among the windmills consisted only of repetitions of the same name and a few dates and obscure records; but a little on one side two names were carved on the wood with a penknife, and a date, the 1st of March, two years back was cut beside them. Michael's eye was caught by this date in-

stantly, and he drew in his breath as he saw it, and then stood gazing on it and on the names, "George" and "Nora," till the light and life seemed first to die out of his eyes, then to flash back strong and moist as he looked with an almost passionate sympathy at the spot where the cutting of the names and the parting which he knew by the date had followed it took place. So absorbed was he in this scene of two years ago that he behaved exactly as he might have done had it been taking place before his eyes. He watched the remembered, or the imagined, "George" and "Nora" across the room, and even went to look down the steps after them, and hurried to the window to see them go across the field. While standing there he heard the door opened below, and the old miller's voice calling him.

Michael started, then hurried to the ladder, but before descending it he stood still, and passed his hand across his face, and drew two or three deep breaths.

He came down at last whistling carelessly, so that Ambray should think he had not heard himself called.

"You're soon back, then, master," he cried, with pretended surprise.

"Yes," answered Ambray, sitting down on the sack of bran again and sighing heavily. "I've been speaking to my wife about this, and she thinks a deal of it. I only hope she won't think too much of it," he added in a lower voice. "But she thinks we ought to see the woman to-night about it, if that's any-way possible."

"Is that wise," asked Michael with a comical look of fright and awe, "if, as I think you did say, the lady sometimes gets a little—a little over-excited on market-days?"

"Hold your tongue with your lady," cried Ambray; "a pretty lady!"

"Is she now?" said Michael, with affected simplicity.

"You'll see for yourself," answered the miller, half savagely, half amused.

As Michael stood waiting further orders, Ambray startled him by saying suddenly—

"Didn't you know then that my brother George Ambray married a hop-picker?"

"Me! I know nothing," stammered Michael confusedly. "I am quite a stranger here."

"Yes," growled the old miller, fixing on him eyes chilled and hardened by a life-long disappointment, "he did, sure enough, and was killed at five-and-twenty out a hunting. He was a gentleman, was George Ambray. Ah, you wouldn't take me for his brother

if you'd seen him. Yes, he was taken when he little expected it, and then everything was hers; and she kept everything, the High Mills and all, though she had a paper that only wanted his name, making them over to me. Years ago she'd have liked to turn me out, but she daren't, for the whole countryside would have been upon her. Besides, the mill did well; she couldn't have had it better filled, she knew that. But she's trying it on now. Yes, and the Lord knows where she'll stop!"

"She's a rich woman too, I hear," said Michael.

"Rich! Why, my brother when he married her had Buckholt Farm down there where she lives now and scrapes her gains together and plays the miser, and clacks her tongue from morn till night. He had the farm and mills—the old black one went too then—and half the church tithes, and some hop-gardens over at Tidhurst besides; then she married Grist, a retired chandler from Bulver's Bay—pretty comfortably off—in fact, there's no telling exactly what he did have."

"But I thought she was a widow," said Michael.

"So she is; Grist isn't in your way if you think of making yourself agreeable to her to-morrow, or to-night. He was taken off by dropsy twelve years ago."

"No," answered Michael, laughing and shaking his head; "the mill wants Grist, but not the miller."

The smallest of jokes went a long way in Lamberhurst, and if there ever was a man who found a joke at the expense of the enemy of his life unpalatable, old Ambray was not that man. It warmed his heart towards Michael even more than the good lines he had thought so much of. He laughed till his old disease, as if enraged at seeing another power usurp its place in the poor old frame, drove off his mirth with a hard fit of coughing.

But when this was over he looked at Michael with a large and hearty liking.

"Come," he said, "I feel like a man who has been giving his guest nothing but bad wine when he's still some of the right stuff in his cellar. Things are not so bad as they seem at the High Mills, Michael Swift. I shouldn't have borne what I have if I hadn't had good reasons for patience. I have nothing to look to for myself, but I don't care for that—what's life to me now? The grain is ground, and the meal sorted, the flour taken away, and the bran left. No, I am nothing to myself now, nothing but an ache and a burthen. God knows what the

world would be to me if I hadn't my boy to think of, and if I couldn't look forward to a better lot for him than mine's been. But it's something to hope and live for to see all that belonged to my father come back to my son doubled, ay, more than doubled. That's what I live for, Michael Swift; that's the wind my sails are set to."

He looked up at Michael to see if he was as much impressed as he intended him to be. He was satisfied, and it struck him vaguely at the same time that he was about ten years older than he had first thought him.

Michael was leaning on the bran bin, resting his elbow upon it, and holding his beard and lower lip crushed in his hand, while his eyes were fixed on Ambray. He felt that they were very haggard, but he dared not move them from the miller's face.

"How old did you say you were?" asked Ambray with a kindly interest.

Michael had not mentioned his age at all as yet, and in his confusion now it occurred to him he had better tell a falsehood about it. But it lay like a piece of lead on his tongue, and he could not get it out. He ended this little struggle by saying, "I am only thirty-two, master, but five years of millering——"

"Takes ten of life," Ambray finished for him. "I often think that Miller of the Dee they sing about—a water miller, of course—must have been blessed with uncommon good lungs to have worked and sung from morn till night, as they say he did. I know I've found the work enough for mine without the singing."

He was silent a moment or two, then began in a troubled voice:—

"I don't know whether I'm glad or sorry that my son gave it up. It seemed a sin to keep him at it when there was every prospect of his taking the upper hand at Buckholt Farm in a year or two; but since things have gone so contrary lately, I have doubted a good deal whether I did right in not keeping him to the mill. Well, I was telling you how the land lies between my sister-in-law and us. It's this way. I had a brother besides George, her husband, and he died and left his little girl with us quite unprovided for. George took her, and for a wonder his wife made as much of her as if she'd been their own, and when George was killed, and his wife married again, little Nora was sent to a good school at Bulver's Bay. When Grist died, the little thing was had home again, and her aunt soon let it be known she was to have everything. George, that's my boy (he was called

after my brother), well, he and Nora were always together—it didn't matter to them whose ground they were on. There was never a day without her being over at the mill, and he had the run of the farm, with his aunt's leave or without it. They were as headstrong a pair of children as ever lived, and when they were grown up and chose to say they were engaged, Grist couldn't help herself; *she* knew Nora, and so, 'having to choose between taking the pair or losing 'em, she agreed to it. I often think she only did so because she thought that was the most likely way to make the girl change her mind, for she's a deep one, Jane Grist is. As for my George, she'd care little about breaking *his* heart, but Nora she *is* tender over; in fact she's the only creature she ever had a liking for in her life."

Michael now roused himself and began to put some sacks up together against the wall, but seeing that Ambray looked at him with a frown of impatience and annoyance on his pale face, he came back to the bin, and again leaned on it in an attitude of respectful attention. As a punishment for what he considered Michael's lack of proper interest in his affairs, Ambray remained silent.

"Does Miss Ambray live at the farm?" Michael at last ventured to ask very humbly.

"She does and she doesn't," the miller answered. "It's her real home, I suppose, but she's sought after so much, and she's away a great deal visiting here and there. She's been staying this six weeks—ah, more than that, pretty near all the winter—over at the Bay, at old General Milwood's, at Stone Crouch. He was an ensign of nineteen when he fought at Waterloo with her grandfather, who was over sixty then. The young people at Stone Crouch are mighty fond of Miss Nora. Money—money, what can't it do? Why, my wife was a head taller than her, and the prettiest girl in Lamberhurst, and nobody ever made *me* jealous. But, Nora—ah, what a fool that boy of mine is! Not but what *she* worships the very ground he's trodden on. Why, she never missed a day all this winter riding over to ask if we'd heard from him—till the last few weeks she's got tired, and no wonder! no wonder!"

Michael, with his brow on his hand and his elbow resting on the bin, held his breath at this silence, for he knew what would come after it—the burst of pain and anger that had been so long restrained.

It came, and Michael's form so shuddered under it that the old padlock hanging loosely to the bin shook and rattled.

"Ah, Michael Swift!" the miller cried, lifting up his head with a kind of proud abandonment to shame and grief; "my son is using us very badly—ungratefully! wickedly! Ah, what I have done for that boy! What I have gone through for his sake, the God I have made less of than him only knows! He fancied himself an artist, and nothing would do but he must go to London and study; and we two old fools, his mother and I, of course must set *his* opinion against all the world's, and get him his way by pinching and begging, and by hook and by crook. Two years he's been away now, and only troubled himself to come home once. Four letters I've written to tell him how Jane Grist is using us, and not a line have I had, except the answer to the first to say he couldn't come, and some hint about breaking off his engagement with Nora; but that was temper, and the girl shall never hear of it. He didn't want to hurry himself home, that's all, and showed his temper in that way. It was a sort of warning to us not to thwart him, I believe. Jane Grist is in high glee, the cat! and thinks Nora well rid of him, and tries to starve us out of the mill, out of the parish, out of the girl's sight; and I write to George and tell him all this, and he—he stays on, making game of us, no doubt, with his fine artist friends.

"But he can't last out long without money—that's my comfort. He'll be humble enough when he's in want again, though he *was* too proud to have his old father and mother go up to London to see him, as they offered to once when times were better. Ah, that was the first blow, that was. He was 'among friends,' he said. *Friends*, the young scamp, what friends had he such as us? He had 'no means of making us comfortable.' *Comfortable*, the young hypocrite! Ah, has he not done that?"

A long fit of coughing followed Ambray's bitter outburst. Michael remained bent over the bin motionless and mute.

The miller said nothing, but he could not help feeling surprise and disappointment at his silence. He thought he had secured a good-natured, sympathetic listener, who would be almost certain to defend his son, and in that manner give him the sweetest comfort that, in George Ambray's absence, the world could afford him.

He got up from his seat on the bran-sack in an ill-humour as soon as his cough was quieted, and told Michael to shut up the mill, and go round to Buckholt Farm to inquire what time Mrs. Grist was expected home.

Michael rose, and came and opened the door for him. Ambray pulled his coat-collar high up round his neck, and passed him without looking in his face. For this, when he was gone, Michael sighed with a great thankfulness and relief.

When he had shut himself in again, he leant his back against the door, and stood looking down with the expression of one contending in his mind against some unreasonable misery.

He stood so for some moments, then went to where the sun streamed through the little window, and looked up at it. Here a look of comfort and faint triumph came into his eyes, and he said softly—

"Ah, George, boy, if *you* could speak for me, you would!"

Afterwards he went about his work of shutting up very quietly, and with a calmer manner than he had yet had since he entered the mill.

He appeared to treat almost with reverence every little duty that came to his hand. The old dog followed him from floor to floor; the setting sun streamed warmly through and through the mill. Michael, though he dared not yet look back and wonder what they were all doing at home, began to feel less strange and chill at heart.

He did not care yet to look far out over the downs when he went to shut the doors leading on to the little terrace, for fear his thoughts should be driven by force of contrast to the dear old green at home. He only took one vague, sweeping glance over all—the stretches of light and shadow, the little line of sea, the mills on the far-away heights laying their sails like weary wings at rest against the sky—the white lane up from the smithy where a party of riders were waiting, their voices ascending in a pleasant murmur with the ring of the blacksmith's hammer and the tinkling of a sheep-bell in the mill-field.

Michael had locked both doors, and was going down the ladder to the next floor with his gentle, noiseless step, when all at once he stood still, and put up his hand to shade his eyes from the sun that streamed towards him. His other hand was still holding by the upper floor, and his eyes full of self-doubt and amazement were looking towards the great bin.

He knew that the mill must for him be incessantly haunted by forms and voices of the past, and for a moment or two he could scarcely feel sure whether he was looking at a phantom of his brain or a reality.

The object of his doubt was a girl in a riding habit, standing by the bin with her back towards Michael, and looking at George Ambray's sketches and the two names carved there.

Michael had barely time to say to himself, "I am not dreaming—it *is* a lady," before she bent her head and touched the names with her lips, then glided to the steps, and without Michael having seen her face, vanished down them as if her feet had been used to them from childhood.

And they had been used to them from childhood, Michael was sure, for he knew that this was Nora.

CHAPTER V.

MICHAEL had not to find his way to Buckholt Farm that evening. He had only just come into the road out of the white lane when he saw a party of tipsy labourers on their way home from the Team, and Ma'r S'one was amongst them, himself perfectly sober and gentle, and looking the meekest and sweetest-tempered of victims.

On being drawn away and questioned by Michael, Ma'r S'one said he was sure his mistress would not be home till late, as he knew she was going to take tea with an aunt of her second husband's, who kept a draper's shop at the Bay.

So Michael wished Ma'r S'one good-night, and went back up the lane.

It was with a dreary feeling that he remembered he did not even know where the miller's house was, and should be obliged to ask his way to it. He had seen Ambray when he left the mill go down a slope at the corner of the field, and he went on in that direction till he came to some cottages, which he would have fancied only the poorest farm-labourers lived in, till at the garden gate of one he saw the miller standing, evidently looking out for him.

He seemed disappointed at the result of Michael's inquiries; but, after one impatient exclamation, he led the way quietly into the cottage, saying to Michael as he appeared at the door—

"Here's my wife—crying, you see—fit to break her heart because Miss Nora Ambray has just paid us a flying visit."

Michael stood with his cap in his hand, trying his utmost not to look at a large portrait over the mantelpiece, which he could not help seeing wherever he turned, though as yet he had not lifted his eyes towards it.

Mrs. Ambray's was a clear-cut, beautiful old face, noble with shadows of other griefs

than her own. When Michael at last found courage to look at it, he saw so much more there than the likeness to another face which he had feared to see, that he felt full of pleasure when it smiled at him, and a voice, as like that face as could be, bade him come near to the fire.

The whole of that first evening at Ambray's house was like a dream to Michael. He can only recall the two voices talking at intervals—and that the talk was all George Ambray, Nora, and the chances of gaining the desired end from Mrs. Grist in the morning.

He understood well that evening what the old people were to each other. The miller's wife was to him no wife now except in name, but only the mother of his boy, in whom his very soul was bound up. He could remember and respect her sorrow on her son's account, but in everything else he slighted and ignored her. With her the case was exactly opposite—there was much more of the wife than the mother in her—she sorrowed over George, but chiefly on account of the grief he was causing his father, whose every look and movement Michael saw she watched with a young, suffering, loving heart in her old eyes.

He seemed to understand them both so well that he could scarcely believe he had not known and watched them many years, instead of a few hours.

When it was late on in the evening Michael was startled by Ambray saying suddenly—

"Esther, get the Bible and read me that about the prodigal son."

A shade passed over Mrs. Ambray's clear face, perhaps it was disappointment, almost jealousy; for she had been for some time attending to his comforts, and had thought that he was regarding her with some gratitude and tenderness.

She obeyed him, but began to cry before she was half way through the story, and Ambray took the book from her and himself read it aloud.

As he read, his harsh, weak voice grew stronger—it became almost sweet—his fine eye lit, and filled.

He finished—then looked back over the page and laid the book down.

When he turned again to the fire there were stains in the white dust on his cheeks, and he smiled on Michael as he said—

"It is different with *my* prodigal. It is I who must go and eat the husks to-morrow, and abase myself for his sake."

Michael said not a word, but bent down very low to pick up a brand that had fallen from the fire.

They put him in George's room, which was fortunately on the ground-floor, for he found it impossible to remain there two minutes, though it was all white and pink, and sweet as an orchard in bloom.

The old latticed window was easy to escape from, and Michael was soon out alone in his world of downs all bathed now in the whiteness and strangeness of moonlight.

He wandered till he was weary beyond the sense of weariness—living through all

the day again and again in his restless thoughts.

At last he went and let himself fall prone upon the ground under the little mill, where he could see the stars through its open sails, and the only prayer that he could pray that night was—

“O Great and Merciful, do but visit this little mill with Thy best winds, and I will grind it out—it was no crime— but I will grind it out.”



PART II.

CHAPTER VI.



MICHAEL slept in the mill that night, and in the morning stood at one of the little windows and saw the sun rise.

It was a sight to which he was well accustomed, and for which he had spared a few moments nearly every day throughout his busy life. Whether it ever en-

riched his mind with one poetic thought is not known, for Michael never had the good fortune to be acquainted with any one to whom he could have ventured to impart such a thought, had it been his; and for expressing it on paper, he had never either time, opportunity, or inclination. But it is certain that Michael *felt* nature, rather than thought about it; that he enjoyed, rather than studied it. He had, too, a feeling, that for a man to take no notice of the grand changes on the face of the universe in which he is as but a grain of dust, was to render himself still more utterly dust-like, helpless, and insignificant. So he laid a sort of honest human claim on everything in nature that was great, mysterious, or wonderful. "Where would be his share in these things after death," Michael vaguely asked himself, "if he did not feel, acknowledge, and claim it now, when his eye was clear and his mind sound?"

There were certain times when Michael's work, to which he ordinarily gave such patience and devotion, would suddenly become to him insignificant as the labours of the ant.

His old father had often been amazed and irritated beyond measure that so rational and manly a son as Michael was in most respects, should still be absurd enough to run out on the green and lift his black beard above a crowd of dimpled, infantine chins, to stare at

a rainbow, or ho'd the mill-sails idle on a breezy May evening, to catch the first notes of a nightingale.

When the light of his first morning at Southdownshire dawned about the High Mills, Michael rose from his bed of sacks and went up-stairs to a window, a mere square hole, which his face nearly filled.

He had better have gone about his work, for this was positively the first time he had beheld the sunrise on any scene but one. On the two nights of his journey he had been weary, and had risen late. So now he found that the daybreak on these fresh fields was not a thing likely to refresh and strengthen him for his morning's work, which he greatly dreaded. It was like an old tune with new words in a foreign language, the music was sweet, but the sense strange, unsatisfying to the thoughts the music created.

The rose and opal lights, the faint cock-crowing, the fresh bird voices, these, indeed, made one part of the morning, but where was the other and dearer part, the familiar sounds of his old home as it began to waken and stir, the familiar sights dawning so pleasantly on his eyes.

The downs shone like emeralds, and the flocks upon them were very plentiful, but the half-bald green at home, and the two veteran horses retired thereon for the rest of their natural lives (or unnatural, as it might please the village boys), these were the pastures and the flocks of Michael's heart.

The little circlet of sea at the end of the valley glittered as no jewel but that one mighty gem of magnitude and depth in its setting of earth and sky *can* glitter, and the sails of the Channel fleet flecked it as the flocks did the meadows. A gallant sight for so true an Englishman as Michael, yet as he looked at it the puny waves of the old pond at home swelled in his memory till they washed all else away, and brought the paper boats of his little brother to make the Channel fleet fly before them.

The sadness of his state of exile was on him, and Michael was obliged to hang his head and own that, grain of human dust as he called himself, the story of that grain was more to him than the story of all creation—the span of its actual existence larger to him than eternity.

Self-pity, however, was a thing of which Michael possessed a very small share indeed,

and he no sooner felt it gaining dominion over him than he turned upon himself with a great contempt, and mocked and laughed at himself right heartily.

Mrs. Ambray, when she came to call him to breakfast, thought he was frowning and growling at his work instead of at himself, and said, "Well, poor John has let the mill get in a state; it's no wonder the man's put out about it."

He did not at first see her, and she had to call him twice.

"Michael Swift! Mi—chael!"

She had come up the ladder till she was able to see into the room where Michael was brushing out the grooves of the great wheel.

In an instant his face, all brightness and gentleness, was leaning out of the wheel towards her.

Mrs. Ambray had of late years acquired a cold and stony manner towards every one but her husband, George, and Nora. She had little complaint herself to make against the world, but as these three had much, she had grown into a habit of hardening her sweet old face and voice against it.

But this morning she could not help smiling at Michael, and speaking kindly as she said:—

"Come—if you've been at work long like this, I should say you're wanting your breakfast."

Michael was too vividly reminded of another dear old face and voice that used to come up the mill, and call him, to be able to answer this.

He crept gently down after her, and as they went out into the warm and dewy field, asked her how the master was this morning.

They were walking side by side, and Michael watched the grief come into her face with a strong compassion as she answered—

"Bad—very bad; but can we wonder? It was enough to kill him yesterday."

When they were come into the cottage, Michael saw the breakfast was but for two.

"What?" he exclaimed; "is the master unable to get up then?"

Mrs. Ambray bowed her head with a stately resignation.

"He has tried many times," she said, "but the cough takes his breath as he takes his clothes, and I've persuaded him to give up the strife for an hour or so and lie still."

Mrs. Ambray had as grave a companion at her sad breakfast as she could wish.

Michael was trying to look steadily at the prospect of the old miller giving up the strife for ever instead of for an hour, and was finding his own life utterly destitute of aim or hope at such a prospect.

Guessing nothing of these thoughts, Mrs. Ambray began to be surprised and touched by the sadness of his face, and to wonder about it.

"You've had a bit of trouble in your life, my man," she said in the tone of one making at the same time a statement and an inquiry.

"Trouble—hah!"

It was half a laugh, half a cry, that broke from Michael, and that shook him as he raised his eyes to hers—part relieved, and part frightened by showing her one glimpse of a misery so wild as to cause her to start up and lay her hand tremblingly on his shoulder.

"Bless the poor fellow, what is it?" she cried; "you've had some great loss just now. Ah, is that it? Your mother perhaps?"

Michael shook his head, with a tender gratitude that seemed to say, "No, thank God, not her."

"Your father, then?"

"No," he answered gently and with the same look.

"Not your wife—sure—you are not married?"

"No."

"Some one p'raps that you—that would have been your wife."

Michael felt the rush of grief and despair which had come over him at her first words of kindness subside suddenly, and give place to alarm at what these questions and these answers, simple as they were, might lead to.

His first impulse was to shake his head as he had done before at each question, but he resisted it, and only bent his head, and taking the kind hand from his shoulder, he said with a heightened colour and an awkward laugh—

"Ah, trust you women for getting at a secret!"

"I am right then; poor fellow! Ah, what a world it is!"

"It is," cried Michael, with savageness, dashing one clenched hand against the palm of the other. "O yes, it is a world—of liars!"

At this moment a faint voice called—

"Esther!" and she was gone instantly.

"And I am the greatest of them all," Michael muttered as she closed the door.

He was in a rage with himself; he could not sit still; he got up and tramped about the room, moving as if he had to push his way through muddy waves or rank grass.

In this manner he came upon the reflection of himself in the mantelpiece mirror, and turned upon it with a sort of snarl, like a dog who does not know his own image. If

the snarl had been interpreted it would have been by some such words as—"So *you* are the man who has cheated the grey head, which may be struck with the deafness of death before you can unsay your words."

In a moment or two he looked at himself more mercifully, then coloured, and soon smiled, raising his eyebrows, and saying, "What do you think of yourself, old boy, as a love-sick swain?"

He went back quietly to his chair at the breakfast-table, and his rage was quite spent. Despair itself had come to comfort him by telling him that he had perhaps told but the simple truth in saying he had lost her who would have been his wife. Michael knew not at all whom this might be, yet he believed he would have married some one sooner or later but for the event which caused him to leave his home. And now what woman on earth would have him when his hands and brain and heart were sworn slaves to that purpose which might take his life to accomplish.

Mrs. Ambray, when she heard him, as she went out of the room, declare that this was a world of liars, concluded that the poor fellow had not lost his betrothed by death, but had been jilted very cruelly.

She told the story, with the addition of many romantic surmises of her own, to Ambray when she had soothed his cough, and it led to the old couple falling, hand-in-hand, into ecstasies of admiration and tender, proud delight over Nora's faithfulness to George.

Michael looked a little shamefaced when Mrs. Ambray came back; but her eyes saw only his sadness, and from it took to themselves a fresh shade of pathetic wonder at the world and its ways.

Michael saw this, and was touched, and remained shamefaced still.

They had nearly finished breakfast when the garden gate creaked with a more prolonged noise than usual, as creaking gates will do when hesitating hands are opening them.

A step came up the garden, and a knock at the door, which Michael, with the habits of a family drudge strong upon him, jumped up to open.

The early visitor was Ma'r S'one.

He was looking tired; for early as it was, much of the "heat and burthen of the day" had already been his. He was looking scared, too, and beseeching, like a child who had been forced to go up to a teacher with a lesson that was not half learnt.

He had made himself particularly tidy for his visit, and had, in his clean smock,—so freshly put on as to show the marks of its folds,—the same kind of innocent self-consciousness as a child in a clean pinafore.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Ma'r S'one," said Michael; "and how might *you* find yourself to-day?"

"Nicely, nicely, thank you, sir," answered Ma'r S'one; but at the same time he stared up at Michael with a humble, self-deprecating gaze, as if he were quite conscious that, however "nicely" he might be, his state was vastly different from that of his kind inquirer.

Backward a scholar in the world's school as Ma'r S'one was, he had yet learnt one lesson of his own setting very perfectly, and that one was—that being so small a creature, with such small capacities, he must rest satisfied with very small things indeed—small wages—small health—small sympathy—small notice of any kind from God or man. When others incomparably better off than himself chafed at their lot, Ma'r S'one could offer a ready sympathy, and he often thought that he must be really the only man in the world who got his deserts. So he always ate his food and lay down in his bed deeply grateful, but timorous of coming trouble.

He was very timorous that morning, as he stood at the miller's door, leaning on his pitchfork, and Michael had not looked at him a moment before he began to suspect him of bringing bad news.

"Be the master 'bout yet?" he asked, when he had replied to Michael's inquiry after his health.

"No," said Mrs. Ambray, who by this time had come to the door, and at whom Ma'r S'one looked very much frightened indeed, and pulled his silver forelock; "he is not up yet—what is it you want, Ma'r S'one?"

Ma'r S'one looked up at her and the patch on the breast of his smock heaved tremulously—his small eyes dilated and his small mouth puckered like the mouth of a child going to cry.

Mrs. Ambray, like Michael, grew suspicious, and her face hardened at Ma'r S'one.

"What do you want?" she said again sharply.

Ma'r S'one shook his head helplessly, as if to express his inability to speak while she made him so frightened; so she waited, fixing her eyes on him with a stony patience.

At last his withered throat began to move, and the small thin voice came.

"Missis is done it. She's let 'em, she has. T' High Mills is let away."

Mrs. Ambray looked at him steadily for a moment or two, then turned and went away, and Michael and Ma'r S'one, following her with their eyes, saw her go straight to the door of the room where her husband was lying.

In an instant Michael was beside her, his arm between her and the door, and closing round her with a son-like support.

"What are you going to do?" he said.

She looked at him, and the look was sufficient answer. He saw that the despair of Job's wife was upon her—that she had been hurrying away to lay her head down by her husband's side, and say—"All is gone, John; let us die!"

Michael's grasp grew firmer round her.

"Come," said he, "if you were my mother I should be ashamed of you. Sit down, and let us talk to Mr. Ma'r S'one a bit. Things may not be so bad as they seem."

He placed her in a chair, and stood behind her, with one hand laid firmly but almost reverentially on her shoulder. He wished to make her feel that help was near, yet dared not tell her so, or let her guess how deeply Ma'r S'one's news concerned him as well as herself.

As they both looked at Ma'r S'one with eyes that plainly demanded a fuller version of his story, he stepped timidly over the threshold, and began at once his explanations, scarcely stopping for breath.

"She never comed 'ome laarst night she dedn't—she ner Ann Ditch—but sent a letter by the red caart to the pos' arifice for Ma'r Simon, and he readed it out to me when I wur fed'n the caarves, and there it wur all about it as she'd let the mills and all this field to Mr. Phillops as had his mill burnt down at Tidhurst. And she dedn't wish fur to shock John Ambray, and thart we'd break it to un fore she comed 'ome."

"When *is* she coming home?" asked Michael.

"This marnin', sir, 'bout 'leven, so it says in the letter as Ma'r Simon readed it to me."

Ma'r S'one spoke solemnly as if he were giving evidence about a case of murder before a judge and jury, and indeed the affair was little less awful to him, for he thought that taking the High Mills from Ambray was like the parting of body and soul.

He was much excited, the bit of colour that was usually firm and ruddy on his cheeks had faded and left them very pale, and his eyes looked shocked and aghast.

He stood gazing with Michael at the face of Mrs. Ambray, which despair was making white and rigid.

"The Lord furgive Mars Garge!" he cried suddenly and with unwonted vehemence.

Mrs. Ambray looked at him, and light came in her eyes, and her lips moved.

"That he never, never will, Ma'r S'one," said she.

Michael's hand grew suddenly heavy as lead upon her shoulder, and he shook her a little as he cried in heavy laboured tones close to her ear—

"Do *you* say that? His mother! Shame! Shame!"

She was much too deep in her sorrow to hear what passed over her—what comfort—what reproach—all could but pass over, not touch her.

Ma'r S'one seeing that they looked at him for no more tidings, and feeling also that he had no more to give, sighed gently, and went his way, closing the door softly after him. In Ma'r S'one's small part on life's stage most of the exits *were* quite ineffective and noiseless. However difficult and laborious, or painful, or pathetic the scene he had been playing, no excitement followed him, no sound of applause disturbed his silence as the end of his little old smock fluttered away.

CHAPTER VII.

MICHAEL was not used to giving advice. His old father and mother, while expecting from him the work of a man, demanded, at the same time, the awe and humility of a child, and would have regarded with deep displeasure any attempt of his at guiding their fast-failing minds.

Unknown to them, however, Michael did direct them very often; but this was only managed by innocent stratagems, at which he was somewhat of an adept. If his father happened to be in a little perplexity, and Michael saw a way out of it, he would give his view of the case by pretending to quote some village wiseacre in whom he knew his father had much faith; or even sometimes profess to remember what he was suggesting as having been proposed by his father himself to some neighbour in a like difficulty. The old man, if he saw the idea was good, would exclaim, "Did I say that, really? Well, I had almost forgotten it; but, upon my word, I think I was very right. What say you, mother?" Then Michael's mother would answer proudly, "What do *I* say? Why that there's none but you could have thought of it, Joseph." And Michael would go back to his work, smiling to himself and whistling softly.

It was, then, no wonder, that though he

had for some minutes felt assured of what would be the best course for the Ambrays to pursue, Michael found himself in much perplexity about how to make known his thoughts to the grey-haired woman, whose mute suffering was inspiring him with more than filial respect and awe.

She sat, with her hands folded in her lap, her eyes gazing straight out before her, her lips closed tightly.

Michael had left her chair, and was standing at the window, feeling her dumb grief go through him as acutely as if she were lifting up her voice in the most loud and passionate lamentation.

It was while her eyes were turning vacantly from their fixed gaze that they fell on him and took in the consciousness of his sympathy.

"Tell me," she said suddenly, "what shall I do? How shall I break this to my poor man?"

"I think, when you come to consider it, you will think that the best thing would be not to tell him yet at all."

"But he is going to beg her mercy. He thinks of getting up in an hour or two and going to beg of her to give him another trial on account of you."

"I think you'll see, when you think over it, that that would just be the best thing he could do still," answered Michael.

Mrs. Ambray shook her head.

"He'd never forgive me if he knew I had let him have the shame of asking for what's gone."

"But is it quite gone?"

"You don't know Jane Grist, my good man, or you'd never doubt it."

She sat silent a minute, her soft brows knit in thought that only turned to pain as it came, and in a little while her tears began to flow down the face she averted from Michael proudly as she could.

"Do we agree that it is to be so, then?" asked Michael gently; "that the master is to go and say his say about the mill and me and changed prospects?"

"Yes, God forbid I should be above taking advice at such a time when trouble makes me helpless as a babe," said Mrs. Ambray.

She rose, and began to move slowly and tremblingly about the room over her household duties.

"I dare say you think I might show myself more grateful," she said, stopping by Michael; "but you don't know, and may you never know, the soreness that comes with gratitude to strangers to such as are like me neglected

and deserted in their need by them who are nearest and dearest to 'em. I often think God only knows what the poor man that the Samaritan was good to felt in his heart because he *was* a Samaritan, and not the one his soul and his flesh cried out to."

She trembled so that she was obliged to set down the loaf she had taken up to put away, and, burying her face in her hands, she turned from Michael, and gave way to a fresh burst of grief.

"Oh! that heartless boy—why was he born? Then there's Nora, she comes here and kisses me, and calls me 'mother,' yet there she stays fooling her time away at Stone Crouch while we're being turned out neck and crop."

"Then do you think Miss Ambray knows about her aunt letting the mills?" asked Michael.

"I can't tell," Mrs. Ambray answered, with sudden sternness and perplexity. "I can't tell."

For the next minute she was silent and lost in thought. Her face was looking both proud and wistful.

Michael knew she was thinking of her niece—was longing for the girl's sympathy and intercession, but loathing the idea of the lady's patronage and charity.

"I may as well tell you," she said to Michael at last. "I have been thinking of Nora Ambray ever since Ma'r S'one was here. Yes, you are right, she would come and fight our battle for us if she knew, I'm sure enough of that; but what I'm *not* sure of is, that we've any right to accept of her help."

"How so?" asked Michael with gentle remonstrance.

Mrs. Ambray walked to the door of her husband's room, and without bending her head seemed to listen there for a little while. Satisfied apparently that he still slept, she came back slowly to where Michael stood and laid her hand upon his arm.

"I didn't think to speak of this which I *must* speak of, to one I never saw till yesterday; but trouble makes strangers soon acquainted sometimes, and it seems as if the Lord had sent you that we might not be *quite* alone in our misfortune to-day. Well, Michael Swift, the truth is, I dare not look to Miss Ambray to help us, because I feel guilty before her. She calls me mother, and my heart misgives me so I dare not look at her when she kneels beside me and lays her proud head in my lap and will have me talk of George. I know she often wonders why I let it cost her so much humbling of herself,

and so many blushes before I do so, but oh, if she knew how the least word that I say of him to her seems to blister my tongue and heat my face—if she knew how I long to go down on my poor old knees before her and say to her, 'Sweet soul, forgive us! my boy cares no more for you than for the father and mother he has set at nought.' Oh, how the girl would rise and look at me!"

Michael's averted eyes became more and more dreary and heavy-looking as Mrs. Ambray made him feel the strength and trustfulness and humility of Nora's love for her son, though it was evident that the suspicion of George Ambray's faithlessness did not surprise him in the least.

"I can—I think I can understand your feelings in this matter," he said, when he had made Mrs. Ambray sit down, and both had been silent a little while; "but excuse me, if I say that I still think you wrong to doubt about letting the young lady know of her aunt's day's work yesterday."

Mrs. Ambray looked up at him searchingly. Michael smiled.

"You think I'm speaking one word for the master and two for the man, I see," he said. "No, begging your pardon, you are wrong there. I could take my lines and get work anywhere. I speak only for your good."

"I don't doubt you," answered Mrs. Ambray, wiping her eyes proudly. "You are not the only one who has been taken with the master at first sight. But as to sending to Nora——"

"It must be done for the master's sake," asserted Michael, with gentle decision; "it must be done."

Mrs. Ambray shook her head.

"It's impossible," she declared. "Who can tell her?"

"Why I can, if nobody else can," answered Michael promptly.

"Bless the man! don't you know Stone Crouch is twelve miles from here," she said; "and Jane Grist will be home at eleven, and it's near ten now, and the master'll be up directly he wakes, and wanting you to go to the farm with him. What's the good of talking in that way?"

"The master has a horse for the little waggon in the shed there?" asked Michael.

"Yes he has," replied Mrs. Ambray gloomily. "Poor old Fleetfoot, who takes an hour to get down the hill to the smithy."

"Isn't there some neighbour who would lend a beast for the master's sake in such a strait as this?"

"No," answered Mrs. Ambray shortly;

"those that would can't, and those that could won't."

"Surely now," said Michael, looking blank; "well, the country's very much like London in some respects. What are we to do?"

"There's only one thing I can think of, and that's ridiculous," said Mrs. Ambray at last.

Michael brightened.

"You heard Ma'r S'one speak of Simon? Well, he is Mrs. Grist's nephew, and is supposed to have the management of things when the mistress is away, though Ma'r S'one really has to do everything and mind Simon into the bargain, who is as frightened at Jane Grist as Ma'r S'one himself is."

"Then how can we expect him to help us?"

"Because he's still more frightened at Nora Ambray; and to please her might p'raps be scared into going to her himself or lending us a horse."

"But who's to work up Mr. Simon's feelings to the necessary state? Were *you* thinking of going to him? Could you go?"

"*Me* go? I go prowling about Jane Grist's premises when she's away! No, Michael Swift, not quite that, even to save the mill."

"Then shall I take Mr. Simon a message from you," asked Michael, "and manage him as best I can?"

"No, no," answered Mrs. Ambray, "a message from me would do harm instead of good. This Simon hates us because of George. He would only be too glad to see us driven from the mill. It's only the fear of Nora's anger that would make him do what you want."

"Then I must go and find him, and do my best, and take my chance," said Michael, looking round for his cap. "There's no time to lose. Good-bye for the present. When you see me again I hope it will be on one of Mrs. Grist's best horses."

It was scarcely half-an-hour after Michael left the miller's house that he was seen riding on a lazy but strong little cob, which was much stared at by two ladies squeezed closely together in an uncomfortably small and high chaise which Michael met crawling along at a very dignified pace indeed.

He thought that one of the ladies stretched out her neck to look after him as he passed; of this, however, he could not be sure, but he was in no doubt at all as to a shrill and rather a nasal voice exclaiming in tones that the fresh breeze brought very clearly to his ear—

"Ann Ditch! I could ha' swore that there was my horse!"

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT since the days when Nora Ambray used to smuggle him from the farm stables for George's use, had the cob known such a rider as he bore that morning. At first he showed much surprise and temper, and endeavoured by swerving from side to side, making dead halts, and kicking, to prove to Michael his utter inability to go at such a pace as that to which he urged him. In a little while, however, he appeared to be growing interested and excited over his own powers so drawn out and put to the proof by Michael; and before long he entered fully into the spirit of Michael's resolute and headlong haste, and overtook and distanced everything on the road before him with all the vigour and impetuosity of his best days. These, certainly, were not *quite* so far back as long idleness and overfeeding had made them seem to him.

"There, old fellow," said Michael, as he gave him a hasty breakfast at the village below the hill that led up to Stone Crouch. "*You've* not enjoyed a bit as you do this for many a long day, I know. You're like a good many of your betters, you are: you've laid lazying and licking the sugar off life till you've forgot the taste of a good, deep, hearty bite."

Stone Crouch was reached before Michael had satisfied himself in the least as to what he should say to Miss Ambray when he saw her, or what message he should send in to her if she refused to see him.

The house was long, low, and of a greenish white stone, lower in the middle than at the two ends, which formed two square towers newer than the other part and whiter. Before it spread meadow after meadow, swept clean and clear by the March winds right down to the sea. Behind it a line of poplars swayed, top-heavy with noisy rooks.

This much Michael could afterwards remember of the outside of Stone Crouch, and no more. He could never recall the face of the servant to whom he spoke the words he said, or the door by which he entered; for the moment he found himself actually asking for the person whom he had come to seek, his head turned as dizzy as when he first heard the noise of the grindstone and the sails in the lane to the High Mills.

The next thing which he remembered, and which he never forgot, was the sound of music and singing that kept breaking off and being followed by peals of laughter and by a chattering of many voices; from which

Michael understood that a number of young people were practising a song, but growing tired of it, and lightening the lesson by snatches of other songs, by witticisms on each other's mistakes, remonstrances for order and attention, and reckless wanderings into soft dance tunes.

From the voices that called to order, and the voices that laughed, Michael's ear instantly singled out one, and hearkened for it, and to it, only. He had never heard Nora's voice before, but he was certain that this one was hers. It did as the others did—sang, scolded, and laughed; and *how* it said to him, "*I* am the stray bird you have come to seek," he knew not, but it did say as much to him very plainly. It seemed to belong to her name—to her story—to the hope deferred that "*maketh the heart sick,*" and which was hers—to her strong faith in the absent, to her love and her watching, to the little mill, to the names cut there, to the parting that happened there, to the lips that kissed the names upon the bin but yesterday, when the mill-sails on all the heights were resting, and the tenderness of night and silence crept along the downs.

"Suppose Miss Ambray sings it alone once more," Michael heard above the merry confusion, and he thought, "*Now I shall hear if this really is the voice.*"

Entreaties followed, the song was sung, and Michael found that he was right.

He could not at first catch many of the words, but the spirit of the song, the voice, and the accent, made him feel unable to stand. Never had the effects of what had befallen him appeared more fearful than at this moment.

He held the heavy dining-room chair, and prayed that God might mercifully keep him unseen by any eye but his for a little while.

And Nora went on singing—

"What will you do, love,
If, home returning
With hopes high burning,
The ship goes down?"

Then, as in the last lines her voice rose in triumphant faith and constancy, drops of sweat stood on Michael's forehead, his lips parted and whitened, and he stared before him like one gazing at a mother hushing a dead child in her arms without knowing it is dead, or at warm blood flowing for a cause that is lost.

Michael afterwards heard from Nora that it was old Miss Milwood, the general's sister, who had taken him into the dining-room, and who had been standing by Nora till her song

was finished to tell her that a messenger from Lamberhurst was waiting to see her.

It was the same old lady who now came to the door with Nora, and went away again, shutting in the music and voices.

Michael took his hand from the chair, and used his whole strength to keep it steady as he held his cap crushed against his side.

At first he felt surprised and chilled at the brightness of Nora's dress, then surprise at himself for being surprised, and fear at the thought of what folly he might be guilty of next.

She came towards him, and he looked at her and took in her image at once and for ever. He knew her nearly as well at that moment as he did in aftertimes when he saw her every day. He understood at once that this Nora Ambray was a woman whose heart was a tyrant to her beauty—which, fresh as it was, was tried and fretted as May leaves are when cold winds return. Lovely as the blue eyes were, and possessed of little points of light ready to spread and brighten into visible laughter at any moment, Michael saw in them the worn, strained look, telling unmistakably of wakefulness and tears, and over-hasty, heart-hurting conclusions concerning the world they looked out upon with so strange a mixture of longing and defiance.

She stood before Michael with all her faults and virtues, all her soul in her face, yet with a certain haughty turn of the chin and lowering of the tender petulant eyelids which seemed to denote most perfect confidence in her own powers of self-concealment, and a calm defiance of the world's scrutiny.

All this Michael saw in Nora when he first looked in her face as she stood waiting for him to speak, her eyes softening with thoughts of home—her lacework frame held laxly by one hand—a great brown tress rising and falling on her heart—restless and eager for his news.

Seeing him so silent and so pale, Nora began to suspect all was not well, and questioned him at first gently.

"You have come from my Uncle Ambray's?"

So George's affianced wife had spoken to him, and must be answered.

His voice seemed gone. He bowed his head.

The brown tress began to stir more quickly—the fingers to tighten on the lace-frame.

"Something is the matter," said Nora. "What is it? Have they had news—bad news?"

He moved his shoulders, he moistened his lips, and tried to look back to his mission, to that morning's history, which Nora's presence had driven far from him, and, in his endeavour to think of it only, he answered clumsily,—

"Yes, that is it. Yes, they have had bad news."

"From London?"

He looked at the little lace-frame thrown down, at the hands clasped over the tremulous curl and heart, and saw what he had done, and let his horror show itself in his eyes, looking into hers as they questioned him.

At that moment he seemed scarcely able to keep his reason.

"London!" he repeated. "No. Who said from London? I did not—I am *sure* I did not!"

"But you mean it!" cried Nora. "Tell me at once what it is. Perhaps you have been told not to tell me. But that is nonsense. I must hear. You must tell me at once."

She looked at him, and took fresh and fresh alarms from his pallor and the suffering in his eyes.

Unable to support herself, she sat down by the table, on which she clasped her hands tightly, and, averting her face from Michael, bent her head like one trying to turn a great agony to prayer. Then she looked up, and asked, with an unnatural calmness in her voice and face—

"What is it? I wish to hear the truth. What have you come to say? You have bad news about George Ambray. Tell it quickly."

She wished to hear the truth; Michael understood that much; in one word he might tell it, and for an instant a passion for truth seized him, and almost made him speak the word that would cover an honest name with infamy, and a sunny hopeful life with despair and misery.

"No," he cried, with sudden strength; "you mistake, I am a stranger. I—I was sent about the mills to you—nothing else."

"Are you speaking truly?"

"My message was, that Mrs. Grist, of Buckholt Farm, let the High Mills yesterday; that Mr. Ambray is going this morning to the farm about it, and your aunt thought you would wish to interfere. This was my message, and I had no other. They have not heard from London—that I know too; and that—is all—I had to tell Miss Ambray."

Nora rose indignant about the letting of

the mills, but with her indignation Michael saw there had come a rush of sweet comfort and fresh hope; and he hung his head and his face darkened.

"Tell them I am—no—only tell them I shall be there as soon as possible. You will make haste back?"

"I will."

"You should stay and have something, for you look tired; but I think you had better not, as this is very important."

She was putting her hand into her pocket as she spoke and drawing out a little purse.

Opening it, she involuntarily glanced up to see what her messenger might be worth, and, meeting the great honest eyes full of gentle dignity looking at her, she felt half inclined to put it back, but pride caused her to refuse to give way to this impulse, and she held something out to him with an imperious air, as if daring him to refuse it.

"You are very good," said Michael, with



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great gentleness; "but my time is the master's—in the mill or out of it."

He had spoken too humbly for her to be angry—she only looked confused, as she snapped her purse to and put it in her pocket; but the next instant she looked at him with bright commendation, and said simply—

"Then I thank you for coming; and you will make haste back?"

"I will," answered Michael.

Another minute, and he was once more on the road, looking back at the great wind-swept meadows, clean and ready for their summer wealth, from the house to the sea,

and at the top-heavy poplars, swaying their noisy heads against the sky.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. AMBRAY'S face, when she opened the garden-gate to Michael, told him at once that the miller was up, waiting to go to the farm, and angry at his absence.

"What have you done with the cob?" she whispered.

"I didn't know what to do with him," replied Michael, "so I've given the blacksmith a shilling to take care of him till I'd asked you."

"You must leave him there, then, for th

present. You mustn't keep the master waiting another instant; and, mind, I've let him think I saw you asleep through the mill window and couldn't make you hear; he's not surprised, for we've seen that you've not been in your bed at all."

As Michael entered, Ambray was standing up, with his tall Sunday hat in his hand. He chose to wear that, instead of his white cap, not from respect to the lady he was about to visit, but because he wished to assume as much dignity as possible on his much-hated errand.

"Pray, is this one of your London habits," he said to Michael, "sleeping in the day, instead of the night?"

"But I slept in the night too, master," answered Michael, rubbing his eyes. "I've had more walking than I've been used to this last day or so—I suppose that's it."

"And what was the matter with your room that you couldn't sleep there, like a Christian?"

"Why, to tell the truth, I hardly felt like a Christian in it," Michael said, turning to Mrs. Ambray with a look of complimentary apology. "When the mistress shut me in, and I looked at the pink walls and the pink and white bed, all rosetted and beveled, I felt like a dog in a bandbox with somebody's best bonnet."

The miller smiled grimly.

"You must let him have the attic," he said to his wife, "if—ay, if—he stays. Come," he added, turning to Michael, "are you ready now?"

Mrs. Ambray went with them as far as the mills, and watched them down the White Lane, feeling a great liking for Michael, as she saw how carefully he guided the miller's weak steps without seeming to guide them at all.

The day was fortunately very warm, and Ambray felt that the air, after his long sleep, was reviving and giving him courage.

"It was just such a day as this when my son went away," he said, turning and looking up towards the mill-field. "I remember the wind was west'ly because he turned the mill round for me—last thing. He didn't like me to have to do even that much—then."

Michael said nothing, but he never afterwards turned the mill to catch the west wind without remembering that it was so George Ambray's eyes had last seen it.

The house of Buckholt Farm was about a quarter of a mile from the High Mills, and stood with its side to the road. It had been an old manor-house, with all sorts of quaint irregularities of architecture and green over-

growths; but Mrs. Grist, after the death of her first husband, had behaved very hardly to it, seizing upon it as on some happy neglected child, and shearing off its ivy locks, whitewashing the fruit-stains from its face, tearing away its flower-garlands, and rendering it miserably tidy.

The white blinds were drawn up to precisely the same height at all the windows, from basement to garret. The door, which in the time of the miller's father had been used to stand open, showing the gleam of the oak passage and silver-mounted stag-horns, was closed, and had an obstinate, inhospitable look.

Some snow-drops shivered in the wintry garden, looking lost and strange like pale spirits who had mistaken the day of resurrection, and come forth before the world was ready.

There was nothing stirring in the yard outside the garden but a bundle of hay moving horizontally along, with two trembling drab things under it which Michael recognised as Ma'r Sone's legs.

In the field beyond piles of hop-sticks were "weathering," ready to be "cranked" or tarred; and the hop-gardens, where the present mistress of Buckholt Farm had once picked the hops barefooted, lay sloping southwards past the little Norman church of another parish.

Against the house at the left of the door a large bundle of birch was fastened by a leather band nailed across it. It looked to Michael so like a symbol of Mrs. Grist's domestic discipline, that he was relieved by seeing the miller rub his shoes against it, and so make known to him its right use. He afterwards found this primitive scraper and door-mat at most of the inland farms and mills of South-downshire.

When Ambray lifted his hand to the knocker, he turned his head and looked up at the High Mills, as if the sight of them should give him the courage that he was evidently lacking; for Michael saw his face had grown paler since they had left the road, and heard, too, that his breathing was becoming short and hard.

The front windows were partially open, and through them, as soon as the miller had knocked, came the sound of the same voice Michael had heard when passing the ladies in the chaise on his way to Stone Crouch.

"Ann Ditch," cried the voice, "whoever's that knocking at the fore door? It's not Nara's knock, I know. Go round and see."

In a minute steps came round from the

back, and looking in their direction, Michael saw a stout young woman with a hard mouth and a squint, who no sooner caught sight of the miller than she ran back again the same way she had come.

She evidently told her mistress who her visitor was; for the same voice was heard exclaiming—

"And why on 'arth didn't you tell John Ambray to go round to the back door? You know I never has the fore doer open 'cept when Nara's at home!"

Ambray raised his hand and knocked a little more loudly than before. Michael would have urged upon him the advisability of at least making a pacific entrance; but something in the miller's face forbid him to interfere.

Ann Ditch appeared again and gave her message—

"Will you come round to the back-door, please?"

The miller did not even turn his head and look at her; and his only reply to her request was another almost frenzied knock.

Ann Ditch, in running back, met Ma'r S'one, relieved of his burden, and consulted with him.

He advanced trembling.

"Do'ee come to the back just fur peace an' quiet, Mars John," he entreated.

Ambray turned and looked at him, and Michael saw something deeper than anger in his eyes as they rested on the old man's face.

"What! Ma'r S'one," said he in a husky but not ungentle voice; "and do *you* think that's the right way for your good old master's sons to come into this house?"

Ma'r S'one accepted the bitterness of the reproof with all his little heart and mind.

"No, Mars John," he cried in great distress; "no, no; I don't, I don't; but, O Lord have mercy upon us and 'cline our 'erts to keep this la'!"

Which law Ma'r S'one alluded to was not known, but this was his invariable adjuration when he saw human passions getting beyond control, or sorrow unendurable; and there had been times when his helpless cry had fallen on tempted hearts with more meaning than Ma'r S'one was aware of.

To his great relief, his mistress proved less obstinate than her visitor; for, after Ann Ditch had gone back a second time, she sent her to open the front door, and Ambray, leaning heavily on Michael's arm, went in.

"Missis is in the parlour," said Ann, leading the way, and into the parlour they followed her.

This room was one kept entirely for use, and showed no attempt whatever at ornament, unless it might be in the manner the sausages were festooned from a rope close to the ceiling, almost crowning, like victorious wreaths, the Sunday hats of Simon and Ma'r S'one, which also hung suspended by their brims from the same rope.

Mrs. Grist sat at the table, casting up her accounts, and pretending for a minute to be too much engrossed to look up when they came in.

Michael looked at her face in vain for one remaining trace of the beauty which had been the cause of John Ambray's poverty. It had vanished as entirely as that year's hops which had garlanded and cast the sweet glamour of dancing lights and shadows over it.

Fat, white, and pasty, with small, almost colourless eyes, low brows, insignificant nose and mouth, double chin, black hair jauntily rolled up into a knob at the back of her head—no waving hop-garlands, no mingling of shadows and lights, no glamour could make that face seem lovely for one moment now. The rose had fallen, the perfume vanished, the thorn lived, strong and sharp.

"Twenty pence is one and eightpence," said Mrs. Grist. "Good mornin', John Ambray."

"Good morning, Jane," answered the miller sternly and curtly.

"And four's two shillin's. Ann Ditch, I won't put up t' harse at that there Lion again—it costis me twice as much as it do at the Dorlphin. Well, John Ambray, I wonder as you shud 'sist so on havin' the fore door opened, speshly with a passel o' men's feet with you, to tread all over the place."

"I don't often trouble my father's house, Jane Grist," replied the miller, more sadly than angrily; "but when I *do* have occasion to come into it I shall never do so by any other door than the one he came in at when he came home wounded from Wareloo; and that he went out at in his coffin, with his head on my brother George's shoulder, and his feet on mine."

"Two and three's five, and seven's twelve," continued Mrs. Grist placidly. "I suppose you've come about the mills, John Ambray—of course you have. Well, it's a very okerd thing, there's no doubt o' that, *very* okerd; but same time you caant expect me to keep two great lumberin' mills like that standin' there dead in the wind, and lumberin' the farm for nothing. I on'y wonder as your own sense didn't show you that long ago, and lead you to tarn your hand to

something else, speshly as Garge is gone the road to ruin."

"Now leave *George's* name alone, Jane," cried the miller quickly and agitatedly, "whatever you say to *me*."

"I'm willin' enough to do that, John Ambray, and I'm not going to pretend as it's not a great marcy for Nara's sake as he's kept away. It's natural as I shud be thankful to see her prospec's all right again, and I am thankful. As to that Garge, I always said as you wouldn't lose much if you was never to see him again."

Ambray, quivering with anger, was turning upon her, when Michael stopped him by a monitory touch of his foot.

He paused, and his cough took away the strength of his passion.

"I told you before, Jane," he said at last faintly and with a great effort at calmness, "I did not come to talk of my son, but about the mills. It's quite right what you've been saying; of course I know I could not expect you to let us go on in the way we have been doing, and I came to tell you I have made up my mind to take a man, and get things all straight again; and I am sure I needn't say how Esther and me'll pinch and live on a mere nothing till we've paid off the long score you have against us."

"Now, what *are* you talking about, John Ambray?" cried Mrs. Grist, looking up with her pen in the middle of a column of figures; "one 'ud think you was pretending you *didn't* know the mills was let, which is nonsense, as I wrote off about it last night, and Ma'r S'one went up this mornin', and everything behindhand in consequence, a purpose to tell you."

"What does she say?" said Ambray, turning to Michael, and passing his hand over his face with a sort of laugh; "she's let the mills? Hah! I'd like to see her do it."

Ma'r S'one had just been putting wood on the fire, and was creeping out again, shaking his head; and Michael caught as he passed by him, murmured in a solemn patient sigh the words—"To keep this la'."

"Ann Ditch!" called Mrs. Grist. "Do come here and tell me whether you meant this for a eight or a five. I *never* see such a girl for figgerin' in all my life!"

Before Ann could approach the table, the miller's fist had descended upon it, close by Mrs. Grist's ink-bottle and account-book.

"Look here, Jane," said he, leaning over it and bending down to make his face even with hers, "I've worked in the High Mills, and they've been looked on as mine since I was seventeen, and now I'm seventy-one. Now look me in the face, I say, if you dare, and tell me that you—you—you—who came from starving in ditches to fatten on the plenty of this house, have let 'em away from me, have beggared me!"

"It's a five," said Mrs. Grist. Then closing her book, she added, "Really, John Ambray, how violent you are—there's the ink all over the table."

Ambray slowly drew himself up and stood erect, while despair and anger strove with equal strength for possession of him.

Suddenly, as he stood staring before him, Michael saw his eyes soften, his head uplifted wistfully.

"Never mind, Ma'r S'one," said the voice Michael had been listening for ever since he entered the house, "he will have a long rest, for I'm not going back to-day."

"Why, Nara!" cried Mrs. Grist, "it's never you?"

As Michael's eyes fell on her when she came in from the passage—the three farm dogs licking her trailing habit, and making frantic, but hesitating, leaps at her hands—he saw instantly that some great change had come over her.

The strained, wan look had gone from her eyes, which seemed to fill the room with light and sweetness as they came into it.

The sight of this new joy and peace in her startled Michael, and filled him with a vague alarm, and set him questioning himself fearfully as to what it could mean.

Seeing Ambray, Nora went straight to him, and laying her hands on his breast, looked up into his face, and smiled such a smile as Michael never before dreamed of.

The miller also looked half afraid of Nora's happiness. Placing a trembling hand on her shoulder, he uttered her name, half questioningly half reproachfully.

"Nora!"

She bowed her head twice, as if unable to do more, then laid her cheek against him, and sobbed out—

"Yes, yes; we will kill the fatted calf and make ready. The dear, dear prodigal is found, and I know that he will soon be here."

PART III.

CHAPTER X.



IN the mill where Michael had first worked, the machinery which regulated the sails to the variations of the wind was reached at an arm's length up the grinding-floor wall. The habit of stopping noise and confusion by stretching up to touch this

had so grown into him, that in any mental tumult, even when he was far away from the mill, Michael would often throw his arm up its full length against the wall, door, or tree he might be standing near, and feel with his fingers, as if he thought that something should hang within reach by which he could restore calmness and order to his mind.

When Nora, after one vain attempt to keep her joy from bursting upon Ambray in his sorrow, like a too vivid gleam of light on eyes that have been long in the dark, gave way to it with the twofold force of tears and laughter, first making with this rain and sunshine a bow of promise on his darkness, then more than fulfilling the promise with her words, Michael's arm was flung up against the wall, and his fingers groped over the slippery oak with a passionate and desperate persistency.

What had she said? The prodigal was found? Whom could she mean, save George? But how, then, could she say that he was found and was coming home?

Like the builders of Babel, Michael's thoughts were struck with confusion. Was he, like them, to be shown by some miracle that the work he had begun, and in which lay all the peace the world could give him, was too daring to be permitted? Was this hope, this vein of gold which he had found and followed in the very pit of despair, to

prove but a deceitful thing, that should lead him deeper into the same pit?

As he asked himself this, a sudden change came over him. The first throng of wild thoughts Nora's words had sent rushing into his brain were banished as cowardly—as base.

What had he been fearing, Michael asked himself. The very thing he ought most to hope for—if it were possible. Could he not bear it? Could he not rejoice at it?

His eyes, full of a desperate and tender courage, looked at the doorway, and he told his God he *could* endure fearlessly the sight of a Lazarus-like face if it might appear there, the sound of a Lazarus-like voice if it might speak answering to a father's and a lover's cry of welcome.

Yes, he *could* endure it even though the face and voice spoke of him such things as should make the man at whose feet he had come to offer a life's service, and all the country in which he was so helpless a stranger, turn upon him and without trial hurry him before that Judgment which he feared so much less than man's.

By Mrs. Grist's clock Michael experienced such thoughts, such sufferings, but for one moment, by his own face they might have had possession of him for ten years.

During this moment Nora remained with her face resting where she had hidden it, against Ambray's, when she saw every one looking at her as she cried out her news.

Ma'r S'one, who had followed her in, picked up the riding hat she had thrown down and stood gazing from it to his own and Simon's, as if its similarity of shape suggested to him the idea of hanging it on the beam beside them, a proceeding which his respect for Nora evidently made repugnant to him. So he stood holding the hat in a state of helpless indecision till Mrs. Grist snatched it from him, and with a push sent his weary little feet tottering hastily back to the path of duty which he had in his timid gallantry permitted himself for one moment to abandon.

Ambray stood looking down at Nora. He had taken his hand from her shoulder, and both his hands and his face seemed eloquent of an instinct warning him against taking her and the hope and joy of which she told to his longing heart.

At the instant when Michael, with his arm thrown up against the wall, was trying to realise how much he could endure if George

might indeed come back, the miller caught sight of a letter crushed in Nora's hand as it rested on his shoulder.

He recognised the writing.

The patient suspense and doubt passed from his face. He held Nora off, and spoke to her gently and half bantering, as if his own faith in his son had never been shaken, and he only had *her* joy to think of.

"He has written to you then, the bad boy? He has written at last!"

Had such a face as Michael had been trying to picture really appeared before him, his own could not have shown more terrified amazement than it did when Nora looked up and answered proudly and delightedly—

"Yes, he has written to me!"

"I may read it? I may read my son's letter?" Ambray at once entreated and demanded.

She put it into his hands, holding them a moment as she said—

"I stopped to ask as usual, feeling so sick of the little shop. And when they gave me this just now, I don't know what I did. I emptied my pocket for the children, and I think I gave Tommy my whip; yes, that I did."

"O Nora! Nora!" cried Mrs. Grist. "Did ever anybody see such a girl! I gave a guinea for it only last Jenuwery," she added, appealing to Michael as the only person likely to be unengrossed by George's letter.

But Michael's eyes were fixed upon his master as he perused the letter, now reading bits aloud triumphantly, now in tender silence, and sometimes looking up and speaking from the fulness of his heart.

"Hah, this is humility! This is coming to his senses indeed. 'Scarcely daring to hope that you will even read this.' Listen to this, Jane Grist," he broke out after a minute. "My son tells Nora he is painting two great pictures to send to the Royal—Royal what is it? O 'Royal Academy,'—that's a place where all the world goes to see 'em. And this is why he has neglected to write lately, he's so short up for time—George always was, you know. Well, his friends tell him they're sure to get in, and yet he says to Nora—where is it?—'I work—I work hard, though I have nothing to hope for, whatever my success may be, but your forgiveness. Nothing else from you have I now any right to dream of.' That's a right spirit, though, isn't it? 'As for father and mother, I can send them no message. I cannot ask them to forgive me till they know what will perhaps make forgiveness impossible.' Tush, bless the lad, I never saw the debt yet in our

family that couldn't be ground out on an honest millstone. O why doesn't he come and put his shoulder to the wheel, and let his pictures be— S'h'sh, what am I saying? But I don't seem to care a rush now whether they get in this fine place or not. Let him come, and hang 'em on his grandfather's walls!"

"Nonsense, John Ambray," said Mrs. Grist. "I don't want 'em. Let him turn an honest penny by 'em if he can."

"What's this?" continued Ambray, frowning. "'Remember that you are free—that I feel myself too vile even to look back on the times when we were so happy.' Ah, I see; right spirit, Nora—it's the right spirit. I should say as much myself, or more, if I was in his place."

Nora, with her eyes full of tears, smiled, and waved her glove impatiently.

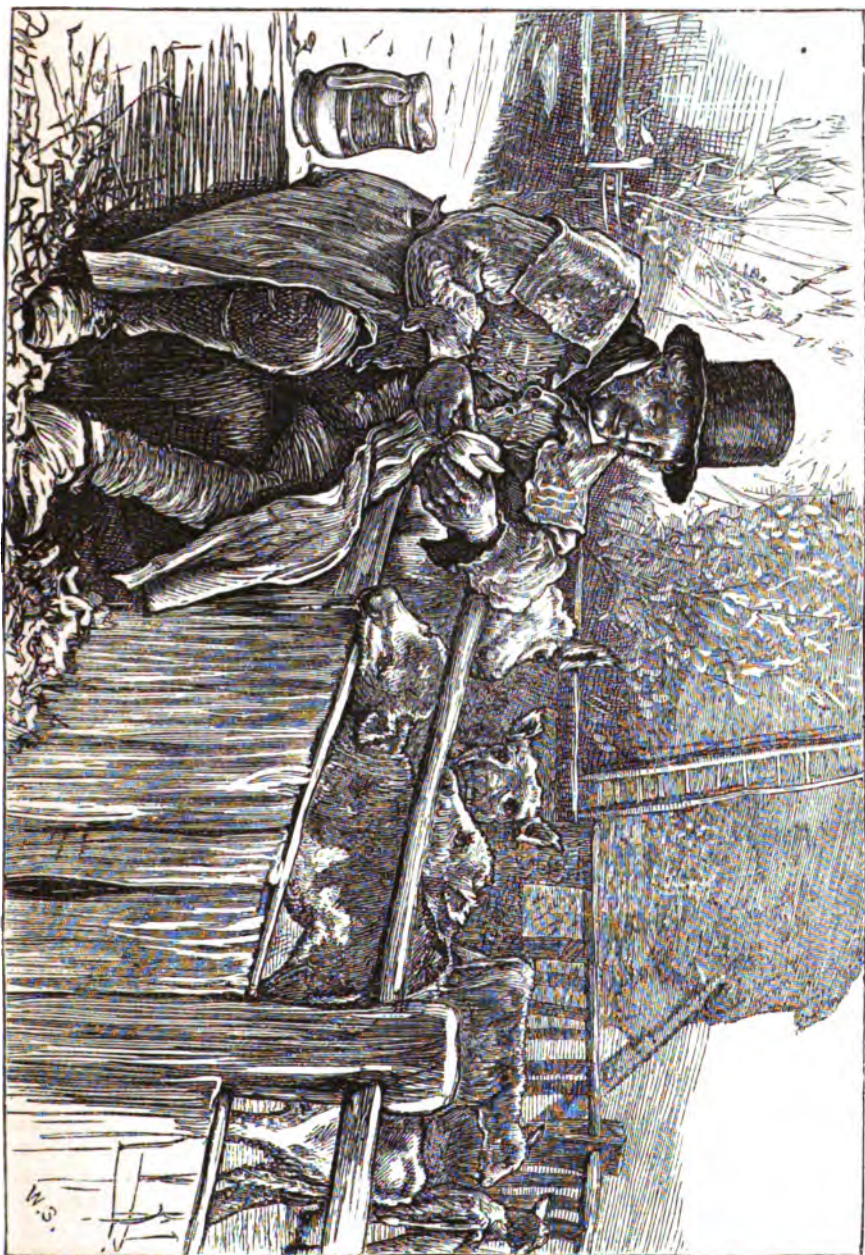
"You are coming to his dream," said she. "Go on—read his dream."

Ambray read:—

"*'I was thinking about father last night, many hours.'* There! who says that lad's heart isn't in the right place? '*And as I remembered all that I was to him before I left home, I came to believe that he will forgive me, even when he knows the worst.'* What, did it take hours to sum that up, George? '*And I fell asleep, miserably comforted. Then, Nora, I had a strange dream about the mill, that made me wake wretched again. I dreamt that I was going home; I don't know where I was, but I could hear the mill, and the sound made me try to hurry on towards it.'* Bless him! There's nature now," cried the miller, much moved. "It's been his lullaby often and often, that grinding has. '*But I could not stir. My feet seemed turned to stone, and the more I tried the heavier they grew. And then I thought that people from here passed me, and I knew they were going to tell father all which I have been too cowardly to tell him or you yet. I tried to shout to them to let me go first, but either I had no voice, or they did not heed me. And I saw them go on to the mills, and I heard my father's voice in the noise of the sails. O, Nora, I was not sure but that he cursed me! And yet I could not move.'* Cursed him! Bless the lad! As if I'd hear him slandered behind his back."

He finished reading the letter in silence, then looked back over it with something shining at the end of his white eyelashes.

"Why, it's enough to make you jealous, Nora," he said, with a tender pride. "He's writing to you, yet here's 'mother' and 'father' in nearly every line—mostly 'fa-



"MA'R SONE WAS THERE SITTING BY THE LOW PEN, TAKING HIS EARLY TEA."

ther' though. Ay, my child, this *is* repentance indeed. You are right—how can we do enough for *such* a prodigal? We have no robe to put on him—except it's his little old white coat that hangs in the mill—well that was a garment of innocence, God knows—and he might do worse than put it on again. We've no rings for his fingers, but we will com—comfort him—won't we, my child!"

Nora fell into his arms with a cry, and he clasped her to his heart, trembling very much.

A hand—too heavy to be Nora's—touched his shoulder. He looked round and saw Michael with one arm thrown up against the wall, while with the other he pointed to the letter Ambray still held.

He was very pale, his eyes were wild and blood-shot, but had a gentle expression in them. As Ambray faced him he seemed unable to speak, though he still pointed to the letter.

"What now, Michael Swift? What have *you* to say on the matter?" asked the miller encouragingly, thinking that perhaps Nora's presence confused the man, and not noticing half the strangeness of his look.

"The date," Michael said, speaking with his breath, and without voice. Then aloud, and with a vehemence that had solemnity as well as passion in it, he repeated—

"The date, I say!—the date! Do you read a letter like that, and feel it like that, and not care to know when it was written and what has happened—I mean what time has passed—since?"

"The date?" said Ambray, looking at the letter. "Why, George hardly ever *did* date his letters, and I don't suppose he's dated this. No, not a sign of a date. But what's the matter with you, man? A date's not a thing of life or death, is it?"

He turned fully, and looked at Michael, and Nora also looked at him in a sort of vague annoyance and surprise.

Michael lowered his head, and dragged his arm slowly from the wall.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said, scarcely audibly. "I only wished to—I—I myself once made a great mistake through—through this same thing. A letter that—"

"There, there! of course you meant well," Ambray interrupted him; "I know that. Where are you going?"

Michael was gliding quietly past him.

Without turning his face towards him, Michael answered gently—

"To the mill, master. I am not wanted here now, I think."

The miller made no objection; so he went out through the door that led into the yard.

Ma'r S'one was there sitting by the low pen full of calves scarcely a month old, in whose society he was taking his early tea.

There was an air of peace and innocence about the simple little picture that made it seem as balm to Michael's blood-shot eyes.

He looked at it for some time, then approached the pen, and leant his arms upon it. Ma'r S'one's elbow, as he cut his bread with a clasp-knife, came just over the top of the pen, and was causing a soft, dreamy contention among the velvety heads there, each of which sought to rub against it.

"You find these creatures pleasant company, Mr. Ma'r S'one," said Michael, after watching a little while.

"That they be, sir," replied Ma'r S'one, looking down at them tenderly. "I'd leiver get my vittles with 'em than up at the Team any day, though it's mighty improvin' there sometimes, bein' gen'y a scollerd there as can read the noospaper right arf without spellin'; but then it's gen'y 'bout murders, and I caan't abide murders—they makes me creep, they do. 'Cline' our 'erts, I say, to keep this la'!"

Michael was gazing vacantly into a sun-blinded velvety face that, baffled in its attempts to reach Ma'r S'one, had come to be fondled by the stranger. At Ma'r S'one's last words, Michael's eyes dilated and swam, his hands clutched each other over the side of the pen, and a hard breath came labouring from him, with the words—

"Amen, Ma'r S'one, Amen!"

CHAPTER XI.

MICHAEL'S existence was apparently forgotten by all Lamberhurst till near sunset, when Ambray burst the mill-door open, calling his name.

"Michael Swift! what on earth have you done with yourself all day? Hollo there! Swift!"

As the miller looked round on entering, it seemed to him a good week's work had been done.

His grey eyes lit with hearty approbation, but, falling on Michael, became instantly hard and suspicious.

As he came forward, his face pale, his hair flattened close to his brows by the sweat of his hard work and the pressure of his cap, which he now held in his hand, there was something in his look and attitude which struck Ambray as being almost abject.

The miller immediately put his hard work to the balance against him.

He stood, looking him full and steadily in the face, with undisguised severity.

When Michael understood the look, he quailed more, and caught hold of the steps.

"Look here, Michael Swift," said Ambray. "Look me in the face, and tell me you are not keeping anything back that if I knew it would prevent my taking you."

Michael remained quite motionless for some time.

At last he raised his eyes with difficulty, showing Ambray nothing in them but the simplest honesty and sorrow.

"Master," he answered with much effort, "I shall tell you nothing of the kind. I don't know you well enough yet to know what might or might not prevent your taking me. All you have any right to ask is for a good character of me. If you don't trust what I gave you to read—you have only to write to the man who has put his name and address on it. I have never done a dishonest thing in my life. I have no more to say for myself."

"Would to God everybody could say as much," Ambray retorted quickly, his doubts dispersed by the light that flashed from Michael's weary eyes as he spoke;—"and with as much truth as I believe you can. You will have a master given to suspicion if you come here as my servant—I don't disguise that from you. I've had enough to make my right hand doubt my left. But come. I must tell you that Phillips's agreement is torn up—done for. My niece has won the day. The mill and the grist both secured for three months certain, and how much longer depends on you."

"This is good news, master," answered Michael, turning away to tighten the knot in one of the bags hanging down from the shafts. Deep gratitude and relief had brought the blood to his face more eagerly than he cared for Ambray to see.

"Shake hands on it, man," cried Ambray, kindling under the influence of his father's old port which he had been drinking freely at the farm.

Michael turned and stretched out his hand heartily, but instantly withdrew it again as if it had been stung.

"No," he stammered confused, but resolute, "not till you know me better, master."

"What," cried Ambray, "you bear malice, do you?"

"I don't—I swear I don't—but I will not shake hands with you till you know me as—I wish you to know me."

"I know you already for a man one must pick and choose one's words for," said Ambray impatiently, "which I'm not used to do for any man alive—so I warn you—but come away and have a glass of wine of a sort that'll put you in a better temper."

Michael smiled as he opened the door. He looked back with a glance of involuntary pride on the improvements he had made on the ground-floor.

Ambray looked too and nodded.

"Very well indeed," he said, "and you can fetch the corn to-morrow. Ma'r S'one is to have it ready for you down in the hop house by six in the morning."

Ambray rose the next day about breakfast time in feverish spirits, and nothing could keep him from going up the field far enough to see the mill, with Fleetfoot and the waggon at the door.

A strong north wind was blowing—the sun made all the fresh downs look yellow—the mill sails swept round against the bluest sky of the year, Michael's face came and went at the windows, a very sun of brightness and content.

Old Guarder, the mill dog, ran incessantly too and fro between Michael and his master, and did his best to keep Fleetfoot from wasting his oats through a hole in his nose-bag by barking at him from all sides, and even mounted to the driver's seat in front of the waggon to try whether his voice would have more weight from that place of authority.

Ambray and his wife went together to the mill in the afternoon to see the improvements Michael had already made there.

Michael, looking down from the stone floor, saw them standing by the meal bin watching the meal as it came pouring down.

The mill was going so fast that it came down warmer than usual.

Old Ambray took some up in his cold, trembling fingers, and felt it with an exquisite pleasure.

"Here it comes once more, old girl," Michael heard him say; "plenty and warm, ay, warm from the Almighty's hand!"

CHAPTER XII.

SEVERAL weeks passed without bringing Ambray any reason to repent of his bargain.

He was much within doors during that time, the weather being changeable and his asthma bad; but he heard from all quarters of the industry and civility of his servant.

When the wind served, Michael worked by night as well as by day.

Far and wide over the country, and far and wide on the sea, people began to look for the light at the High Mills every windy night.

The little waggon, with Michael standing a few yards in front of it, smiling at Fleetfoot's slow advance with a kind of placid despair, became one of the most familiar sights on the road and in the lanes about Lamberhurst.

He had as yet made no friend but Ma'r S'one; and there were days, when Ambray was confined to his bed, that Michael passed without speaking or being spoken to from morning till night; and this to one who had not been used to walk a dozen yards without receiving a greeting from familiar lips was a very strange experience. It was the more so to Michael, because of his having always been possessed by a strong interest in his fellow-creatures.

Sometimes in the spring evenings, when Ambray was suffering more than usual, and his wife scarcely left his side a minute, and when there was nothing doing at the mill, Michael found his time of leisure—brief as it was—hang very heavy on his hands.

Once, when he looked in at the Team by way of a change, the company, unable in his presence to think of anything but the High Mills and their owners, conversed all the evening about "Ma'r's Garge" and his feats in running and wrestling, his handsome face, his good humour, his pleasant word to everybody, his popularity among rich and poor, his looked-for return.

Michael never spent another evening at the Team.

He tried several times to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Grist's nephew Simon. He went down to the farm and made polite inquiries about him every market-day after he had seen Mrs. Grist and Ann Ditch go off in the chaise with the butter. But the answer he received from Ma'r S'one was always either—that "Ma'r Simon" was asleep, or that "Ma'r Simon" was "arf," which last Michael had come to understand meant off to the Team, and for that reason would be deaf to the voice of friendship or duty for the rest of the day.

When he had been a fortnight at Lamberhurst, Michael had a letter from home. It was short and cool enough, but he was as agitated over it as a little schoolboy whose dimpled fingers tremble round the seal of his mother's first letter.

Michael's letter was from his father.

"The Green, Thames Dutton,
April 19, —.

"DEAR MICHAEL,

"I am very glad to hear you got the place you was after, and your mother is glad you are quite well and comfortable. We are pretty well, thank God, except for rheumatis in the same leg as before. I posted a letter the day after you left, which I found directed but not stamped in the pocket of poor Grant's coat. We supposed you meant to take it with you, as it was directed to the same place as you are at, and forgot it. I dare say it will have reached all right. Your mother pertic'lerly hopes you go to church reg'lar, and has your things mended weekly, as your brother Tom has just come home in a shocking state.

"Your affectionate father,

"JOSEPH SWIFT."

Michael felt that there was a great necessity for this letter to be destroyed; but he could not do it. It was read, laughed, and sighed over, as if it had been the most brilliant and moving epistle that ever was penned, and when it had become worn almost to tatters in his pocket, it was placed between the leaves of Michael's Bible, where it remains to this day.

Nora rode over nearly every morning. Her visit at Stone Crouch was coming to an end, and her aunt was busy with preparations for her return.

Michael dreaded this return beyond everything. Ever since she had looked at him when he spoke of the date of George's letter, he had felt as if he would rather face anything than meet her eye again.

Even if he chanced to be seated with Mrs. Ambray at dinner or tea, when she came he would disappear at once, leaving not only the room, but the house, and sometimes while it was raining heavily. The Ambrays were always too much excited by her visits to take any notice of Michael; but Nora saw and noticed him, and wondered he should have so much delicacy, and wished Simon was more like him.

No more letters, dated or undated, had arrived from George; but as he had said that he should not write again until the fate of his pictures was decided, this caused no surprise or disappointment.

The three loving and expectant hearts kept each other full of happy restlessness with the idea that he might arrive any day, any moment.

Every night Michael heard his master re-

monstrating against the house being shut up so early, and he knew he kept awake an hour or more, sometimes many hours, after all was still and dark, straining his ear for the step, the knock, the voice, till his heavy eyelids fell and shut away the world and its vain hopes, and he was stilled with a foretaste of death's tranquillity.

Michael knew all this because the walls were so thin he could hear every word that was spoken below almost as well as if he were in the same room with the speaker. And often Ambray, long after all had been silent, would ask his wife if she did not think there was a sound like wheels or horses' feet coming up the White Lane, or tell her that Guarder had barked, or the gate had creaked.

There were times when the consciousness of these grey heads lying awake far into the night in such trembling and tender expectancy became almost unendurable to Michael.

Starting up, he would half dress himself and steal barefooted down the steep, narrow stairs, stand with his palms against their door, and be within a breath of bursting it open and falling on his knees before them, his face scarcely needing language as an interpreter. But before anything else was done, when only his noiseless feet had stood there, and his noiseless palms touched the door, he would turn and fly back, leaving upon the walls that shut in the stairs the prints of his moist hands dying away in the moonlight.

Back in the thin-walled solitude of his little room, where he was forced to be so quiet and careful, he would cast himself upon his bed, thanking God he had gone no further, and telling himself he must not, could not, make known to these poor, weak, loving creatures the full extent of their sorrow, till they had learned that they had at least a more faithful servant, if not a better son than George, to support and comfort them.

CHAPTER XIII.

AMBRAY was suspicious of enthusiasm. He could understand and honour a man doing his duty honestly and to the full; but such work as Michael gave for wages, which, as the miller said to his wife, "the man had not yet seen the colour of," was a marvel and almost a trouble to him.

Work that went beyond duty was regarded by him as a kind of conscience-offering.

It was Michael's duty to give his best attention to the grindstone, to turn all winds to good account, to keep the mill clean and free from damp, to carry the meal and flour

to the villages and farms from which it had been ordered, to be civil and obliging to his master and his master's wife, and to be considerate of the age and nerves of two such valued and venerable servants as Fleetfoot and Guarder. A grinder who neglected any one of these things would have fallen into great disfavour with Ambray.

But here was a man, who, not content with making good use of the day and the day winds, must needs spend most of his nights also, laying in wait to catch and yoke to his master's service each wind that moaned across the dark and solitary downs, or came sighing up the valley, moist and heavy from the sea.

On breezeless days, Michael devoted his time to the cultivation of a piece of ground belonging to the mills, and lying between Ambray's cottage and a pasture-field of Buckholt Farm.

The half-wild, half-barren state in which this had lain for the last five years had troubled Ambray sorely, being a constant theme for Mrs. Grist's calm satire, and a cause of dissension between himself and George; for George had disliked gardening as much as "milling," and his father's strength by the mill alone was greatly overtaxed.

It was therefore no small pleasure and triumph to Ambray to see, and have others see, his unprofitable little wilderness thus brought to order and use; and claiming its small, sweet share in the universal bloom and promise of the spring.

All April possessed no touch of green so fair to his eyes as the buds that opened on this spot, nor any note of music so sweet in his ears as the singing of the birds above the soil Michael had cleared and refreshed.

Yet as he crept along, leaning on his stick, wrapt up, and keeping as much as possible in the patches of sunshine, he would watch Michael at his work with more suspicion than gratitude.

Sometimes Michael would look up, and meet his strange gaze with eyes so perfectly frank and honest that the miller felt ashamed of himself, and would go home and abuse his wife for not having provided a better supper for Michael.

But once or twice Michael had encountered his master's look in a very different manner—his eyes had turned to the earth, sick and confused, his hand had trembled on the spade. Then Ambray had looked at him hard—he was not a merciful, though he was a just man. He had looked at him as if he would search

out the secrets of his soul, and Michael, when he next sat down to eat in the old people's presence, knew that they were regarding him as one who had come into a strange place to hide him from the shame of some dishonest act.

Sometimes Michael bore this treatment with exceeding patience and meekness; sometimes he chafed under it with subdued but visible passion, dashing the mill keys down when he went to bed, and treading the floor as if he would grind it to powder.

These fits of temper did more to reassure his master as to the wholesome state of his soul than anything else; yet Michael hated himself whenever he had been possessed by one of them even for a minute, and did his utmost to retain that very gentleness and forbearance which roused the miller's suspicions.

But more and more often, as the spring came on, Michael saw upon his master's face the look which said as plainly as look could say—"I shall find you out soon, my man; you cannot deceive me long." Yet, in spite of all his obstinate suspicion, scarcely a day passed without Ambray deriving some ray of comfort, cheerfulness, and renewed love of life from that very study of Michael's character to which his suspicion moved him and which strengthened his suspicion. The glow of a spirit more healthful, more honest, more fervent than any that had lived near him before was warming and comforting him, and he knew not whence the warmth and comfort came. It was the sunshine of the spring, the prospect of his son's return, Nora's bright, brief visits, the certainty of keeping the High Mills for yet three months more—anything, in fact, but the companionship and service of the man whom he was determined to "find out."

Nora came home about the middle of April. On the same afternoon that she arrived with her boxes at the farm, Ma'r S'one toiled up to the miller's cottage holding—with the edge of his smock between it and his fingers—a little note. It was an invitation to Ambray and his wife to drink tea with their niece and Mrs. Grist.

The miller was for refusing it, but Mrs. Ambray and Michael overruled him, and prevailed upon him to let Ma'r S'one carry back a grateful acceptance.

After that day Michael never left the mills without taking a long look from the little terrace to ascertain that Nora was not on her way to or from the cottage. When he reached the door he stood still and listened, and if he heard her voice within—as he did several

times—he would return to the mill, or go and work in the garden till she left.

The first time that he saw her face after her return was at church. She and Mrs. Grist now sat alone in the large old pew, where Ambray used once to sit with his father and mother, his old grandfather, and all his brothers,—while he was yet too small to know the weariness of having to dangle his feet a few inches above the hassock they could not reach,—while indeed he was still too little to dangle them at all, but could only turn, direct towards the pulpit, a pair of tiny soles, which perhaps pleaded his small cause eloquently enough by thus simply and mutely offering evidence of their very recent and slight acquaintance with the earth, among the sinners of which their owner was called upon thus early to proclaim himself.

The grey head which now bent beside Ma'r S'one's and others as lowly, on the most backward of the free seats, told a very different story, offered very different evidence as to its need of mercy.

It was during the sermon, when Mrs. Grist slept soundly with her fat hands folded on the large pocket-handkerchief spread over her claret-coloured satin dress, and when Ma'r S'one and a curly-headed ploughboy, between which two Michael sat, were requiring constant reminders from each shoulder that he was neither a pew wall nor a bundle of hay, it was at this time that he ventured to look at Nora.

He had scarcely done so when his eyes fell full of perplexity and wonder.

Why was she so pale, so different from when he had last seen her face in the parlour at Buckholt Farm?

He dared not look again, because her eyes had been gazing straight towards the seat which he shared with the Ambrays and her aunt's servants, yet he would have given much to know whether her face was indeed so altered as it had seemed to him; whether it really wore that look of vague suffering, that desire for divine guidance and help, a desire which had appeared to him to be expressed there as humbly as it was on Ma'r S'one's face, when he prayed that his heart might be inclined to keep his Master's laws.

If he had been right, if her face had really looked so, what had caused the change?

Had George Ambray's letter, read many times, begun to have a different meaning for her at last? Was she beginning to suspect that something worse than debt, and long absence without explanation, had wrung from him those expressions of repentance

which had so moved her and gladdened his father's heart?

While he was trying for courage to look once again at Nora's face so as to be better able to answer himself these questions, the voice which Mrs. Grist had found so soothing ceased; and she woke with a start, and fixed instantly a look at once appreciative and critical on the old vicar, as if, on the whole, she approved of the sermon, but could decidedly point out a flaw or two in it if closely questioned on the subject.

Ma'r S'one also woke, sighing and shaking his head, and murmuring very self-reproachfully—

"Cline our 'erts," and finishing his prayer upon his knees.

The plough-boy, too, lifted his curly head from Michael's shoulder, turning upon him as he did so a look of surly indignation, as if requesting him not to take such a liberty again.

Now comes the blessing, the silence, the rush of fresh air and sunshine through the door the beadle has noiselessly opened, mysterious sounds among the Union boys as they are trying to persuade each other, by nudges and kicks, to begin the general uprising; mysterious sounds, also, among the old men in the free seats, a gentle fumbling for sticks and crutches, patting and coaxing of stiff, gaitered legs, that apparently have mistaken this for their last journey here, and gone to sleep. Silence again, then suddenly, and at its full, the noise of the rising of a large parish in a little church; the mingling of rustling silk and creaking old limbs, the roll of the organ, the light fall of well-to-do feet, and the grinding and clattering of myriads of little hobnails. Down sails Mrs. Grist, the richest woman of the parish, placid, self-conscious, doffed to and nodded to by high and low.

Will he see Nora once more? Michael wonders. No: the crowd hides her, the Ambrays are waiting for him at the tiny side door.

One more glance across the motley little mass, moving all one way, across the smart bonnets, the files of tiny corduroyed figures; but it is a vain glance. He sees no more of Nora, and in another instant finds himself again by his old master, the old duties, the old sickening necessity of listening to the old story pressing upon him.

How sick he feels this morning of these glittering downs and the old mills that seem to look loweringly upon him from the hill as he toils on towards them, supporting his master, who leans so ungrudgingly upon him,

because he thinks his arm unworthy of giving him support! How sick, too, of the thoughts of seeing again that door of George's room standing open to show him directly he enters the miller's house, its almost awful air of expectancy and waiting!

CHAPTER XIV.

A WEEK of wet weather, with scarcely a gust of wind from Monday to Saturday, had improved neither Ambray's cough nor his temper.

Michael was beginning to look habitually scared and downcast at his approach, and at the sound of his voice.

On Saturday evening, more as an excuse to escape from the cottage than from any other motive, Michael pretended to remember that a hinge of one of the mill windows was loose, and might be letting in the damp if left over Sunday.

It had just ceased raining when he went out, but all the world looked as if it could never dry up and brighten again; and the mill had a stark, dead stillness and lifelessness about it by no means cheering to a miller's eye.

Michael entered and went up to the stone floor, where he stood looking out half vacantly from the window of which he had spoken.

He had pushed it open, and was watching the smoke rising, or rather being held down by the damp as it came from the chimneys of Buckholt Farm.

He had been standing there for nearly ten minutes, not thinking so much as being over-gloomed by thoughts that came like the clouds passing above him without any working of his mind.

There had been no sound since he stood there but the water dripping from the mills and the pale trees; but now he was startled by hearing a loud bark from Guarder; which was immediately answered by a bark from another dog, and then there was a noise, as if challenger and challenged rolled over on the stones together.

Michael looked down from the window. He did not see the dogs, but he saw a figure walking along on the grass by the side of the path, and after his first glance at it he fell back a step or two and stood watching its approach.

His own face had changed in that moment; had lost its look of sadness and vague foreboding, and taken on it the blank, breathless air of one confronted suddenly by a new and an unexpected calamity.

The figure came too near for Michael any longer to see it.

The bell fastened to the ground floor door rang loudly; an instant after he heard the lifting of the latch.

Michael turned and looked at the opening in the floor where the ladder was, and breathed hard.

He knew his delay must be but momentary; he *must* go down, whoever, whatever waited him. That was Ambray's door at which the summons had come; he was Ambray's servant; there was no help for him.

He was a stranger, there were none to take his part.

His eyes, turning slowly and heavily about in a despairing search for aid, fell on the grindstone.

He went and stood before it, and looked down at it, and the panic and despair in his eyes softened and kindled to sorrow and passion.

Without moving his lips, and while keeping his eyes, misty, and burning, and still, cast upon the stone, he pleaded mutely with God.

Was the stain which his hands had inno-



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cently brought upon this stone, and which none saw but him, *not*, after all, to be ground out by his hands, though he was willing to make that work the aim and end of his life?

Had he not for this purpose deserted, in their old age, his father and mother? And had any one seen the pathos of Michael's eyes as he set this deed before his Maker he might well have believed these two to be little less than angels, instead of being the most selfish old couple in the world, as in truth they were.

Had he not been patient since he came

here, and was his patience, and was all his work to go as nothing? Had the end indeed come? Was Ambray to hear all now—this day—this evening; was his fury to come upon him in this dull rainy light, while the mills were standing still, and every one's door was closed on the drenched world?

Slowly and with a certain faint trustfulness in his face, Michael at last approached the opening, set his heel on the ladder, and went down.

He did not pause an instant in the grinding-room, or on the dressing-floor, where he

threw one quick glance at the sketches on the bin, but went on down the broader steps till he came close to the open door and the person who had admitted himself.

The visitor stood with his hand still on the latch, and his face turned in the direction from which Michael came; though his eyes were not looking in the same direction, but were turned to the ground with an attentive expression.

He was an old man, of medium height, dressed in patched and ragged clothes, the appearance of which a thorough drenching had not improved. He had a long white beard, and a high forehead, and was superficially venerable looking, but to eyes that rested on his face many moments, it was evident he was not wanting in the low-cunning and brute strength of nerve natural to the born vagrant.

His blindness—for Michael knew it was this affliction which caused him to keep his eyes on the ground while his face was lifted towards the steps—his blindness, no doubt, kept him unaware of how plainly his mouth revealed the half pitying contempt with which he regarded the world in general. Why, it was difficult to tell.

All that was unpleasant in the old man's face struck Michael now for the first time.

When he had seen that face before—the only occasion on which he ever had seen it before, it was under a flaring gas-lamp, in a crowd—and all that had struck him in it then was its age—its white beard, its blind eyes rolling and straining in their sockets in helpless and yet awful anger—he had seen it thus, and for one minute only, and the image of it had never quite left him since. He had never wished it to leave him. He had cherished it in his memory that he might say to himself, when he grew faint-hearted and sick of soul over that minute's history, "Could *any* man have looked on this blind face, and stayed his hand just then?"

Would the old man know him? He had heard his voice that night, and Michael knew the wonders of blind men's memories.

The old man, far too dignified to lift his hat, pushed it further off his forehead, and assuming a proud meekness of voice as well as some vague sort of emotion, inquired—

"Sir, do I—do I stand before—Mr. Ambray?"

"No, Mr. Ambray is not in the mill," Michael answered without hesitation, then watched, searched the face before him with patient intentness for any sign of recognition or his voice.

He saw none. The blind man was evidently aware of something that made his senses very attentive over the voice itself while it spoke, and for an instant or two over the recollection of it when it had ceased speaking.

This, however, might be his habit when hearing, as he must so often have heard, voices which perplexed him for the moment through their resemblance to other voices.

Not the least curiosity or excitement followed his very careful study of Michael's voice and its vibration.

Having learnt that the master of the High Mills was not present, he became less ceremonious. Letting go the latch, he stepped briskly in and took off his hat, and shook the wet from it in Michael's face.

"He'll be here some time to-night, old Ambray, won't he—eh?" he asked, rubbing his knuckles, which, while shaking his hat about, he had knocked against a shaft.

"No, he won't," answered Michael.

Again there was the same attentiveness over the voice while it spoke, and after it had spoken; and again the same lack of excitement followed the consideration.

He put his hat on, and Michael was half hoping, half fearing, he would go without making known his object in coming there.

But the old man, after feeling about, touched a sack of flour, on which he immediately seated himself, wet as he was, with a grunt of satisfaction.

Michael only wished he had been an utter stranger, that he might give him his opinion upon this proceeding.

"You Ambray's man, eh?" inquired the blind tramp, adjusting himself comfortably on his yielding seat.

"I am, and I am going to the house. Can I take the master any message?"

"No, thank yer, young man. Must see him. Must see him. Come another day. I'll have a rest now. So this is a mill. Never was in one before."

If he were never to be in one again, Michael thought, so much the better. "I like the smell of it," said his unwelcome visitor, lifting his nose and sniffing vigorously. "By-the-bye, where's my dog? Just look out and see, will yer? Here! Jowler! Jowler!"

Before Michael had made up his mind whether to obey this command or not, a miserable animal, who looked as if he had a share in all the cares of the world, rushed in with a string attached to his collar, and entangling his legs as he ran.

"Come, Jowler," said his master with unaffected feeling; "come and let us see if

that clumsy country brute hurt you. You shud keep that beast chained up," he added to Michael, as he carefully felt Jowler all over; "he flew out very savage upon Jowler, and I'll let yer know, my man, if he'd a hurt him it ud bin as much as his life's worth. A retriever—yours is a retriever, ain't he? Well, you've just to ask and pay to git another, exactly like him; but I'd like to know the name by which you'd find another such as Jowler."

As Michael could not deny the difficulty of such an undertaking, he made no answer.

"Your young master's at home now, ain't he?" asked the blind man suddenly.

"Who?" said Michael involuntarily, and understanding what was meant the instant he had said it.

"Young Ambray—your master's son—George Ambray—he's at home here now—eh—ain't he?"

Michael laid his hand on the shaft, and looked steadily at the blind face.

There was a world of covert meaning in it—a world of secrecy and cunning; but Michael drew from it, in spite of this, the belief that the question had been put in good faith—that the man was really ignorant as to the thing he had asked about.

From that moment he drew freer breath. Why, he asked himself, should he fear this man if he neither remembered meeting him that night nor knew of what had happened since?

Why was he here, then, inquiring for Ambray? No doubt to bring some charge against George. If this should be so, he must keep the man at all hazards from meeting Ambray.

For the next few moments Michael suffered a great contempt for himself for having thus been overwhelmed with fears for his own safety, and keeping his eyes closed to what might prove danger to the name which he had sworn to keep as unsullied as he might.

Was it selfishness or great unselfishness that made Michael feel suddenly cheerful and courageous when he found he had to do battle on George's account instead of his own. It was a question Michael found himself unable to answer when he thought of it some hours after the mill was closed and he had gone home.

After considering a little while, and looking with puzzled eyes upon the blind man and his dog as they settled themselves more at their ease on his sack of flour, Michael thought the best thing he could do would be to try and remove the impression of extreme

disrespect and inhospitality his silence must have given.

"Might you have been born blind, now," he inquired, "or was it an accident?"

"Accident! no, thank yer, young man. No, I'm happy to say I'm a so-born. Don't know nothing about sight at all. Never seed in my life."

"Well," said Michael, trying to keep his patience as his saturated guest stretched himself on the flour sack, pommelling it to make a comfortable place for his ragged elbow, "it's a blessing to be contented, certainly."

"Contented! Why I wouldn't have sight at no price; it 'ud be like a hextra arm or somethink o' that kind—I shouldn't know what to do with it. Here, p'raps you'd like to have a look at my stiffikit."

While Michael was wondering what on earth that might be, the blind man drew from his pocket a small parchment roll, which having untied he held out to him.

"There," said he as Michael took it; "I wears that 'ere round my neck, but most folks in London might be as blind as me for the notice they takes on it. Not as your country bumpkins are much better. They will read it, it's true, stand before yer, a concealin' of yer from the public thorerfare, and spell it out to the last letter, then walk away as coolly as if they'd bin a readin' it on a dead man's tombstone."

Meanwhile Michael was reading on the card, written in a schoolmaster-like hand, the words, "Christian charity is solicited on behalf of Richard Bardsley, born blind, who at the age of seventy-three walked from York to London, where he waits his end in the full reliance that his generous-hearted fellow-creatures of this city will not see him starve."

"And you find Jowler a pretty fair guide?" asked Michael, venturing to pat the queer head as he returned Mr. Bardsley his card.

"Well, yes," he answered, turning towards Jowler, who was showing the whites of his eyes as he lifted them to his master with an expression which seemed to implore that he would please say the best he could of him; "Well, yes, leavin' out o' the question one or two little failin's which all sight-gifted natur, human and otherwise, is invariably addicted to—and namin' which I must, I really must"—shaking his head at Jowler, who gave a little whine, and twisted himself as though he knew well enough something not altogether pleasant was being said of him, and he entreated his character might be spared as much as possible—"must specify POUNCING as the most wicious, and apt to trip a person up

unawares, specially when it's after a sparrer on the edge of a curbstone, or a rat in the bottom of a ditch. I might mention fixin' his mind on perticler streets, and always tugging in them particler directions, as ilconvenient to a person who happens to have a will of his own likewise; but tugging is a ilconvenience only, pouncing is a wice—a wice!" And Mr. Bardsley shook his stick at Jowler with one hand, while he felt a large bump on his forehead with the other.

As Jowler looked depressed, and gave a melancholy yawn, after this account of him, his master felt it incumbent on him to put his hand in his pocket and draw forth and snow to Michael the little money-box he usually carried, and which was heavy enough when holding ever so few coppers, Bardsley assured him, to try the teeth and temper of any dog living.

"And what is more, sir," said Bardsley, "there is a haction of Jowler's life, which did ought to a won for him a respect above coppers, as makes the box heavy about little, and ~~is~~ trying to his teeth. It is a haction I should have had recorded on the stiffikit, only the young man as wrote the present stiffikit in this here beautiful hand was caused, by circumstances over which he had no control, to leave the country—that is to say, sir, he was transported for forgery; and I was afeard, as two different handwritin's on the stiffikit might look unprofessional, consequently Jowler's haction is still between himself and me and the Almighty. It was a time, sir, when bad luck did seem, like a bloodhound as 'ud tasted our blood and meant to have the last drop. My little grandchild had come into the world a few hours or so, and was a crying at it still with all her might and main. My poor son, a so-born, like myself, was a waitin' on her and her mother, and blubbin' with joy as his little child was born to see, and which she were, sir, with sorer as she shud see such trouble in the beginning. I lay on a mat in the corner, racked with rheumatis, and Jowler hard by, a growlin' out now and then in his sleep with

hunger. Not a crumb had any of us had for more hours than would be credited. Every mornin' since I 'ud bin bad had that there dog stood waitin' with the box in his mouth a tryin' to coax me out. His own feelin's taught him how badly money was wanted in the box, for he had always been used to bite short when it was empty. His respect for the box though is nothing in regard to his respect for the stiffikit; for, seeing people stand and stare at it *afore* they drop money in the box makes him naturally look on that as the most important. He wouldn't by no means let me go out without it, as I used to be goin' to do sometimes in my flurry of mind when my poor son's wife was in her tantrums. He'd go back and stand at the head o' my bed where the stiffikit was hung on a knob, and there wait till I come and took it down and put it round my neck. On this mornin' I'm speakin' of he wakes up all of a sudden, gits the box, brings it to the head of the bed, and sits looking up at the stiffikit, and giving little pitiful howls. Presently he begins makin' jumps at it. Then it all came to me what he was after. 'Come here, old boy,' says I; 'have yer own way, and the Lord guide yer.' So I twisted the stiffikit string round his neck short, and he dashed out. He hadn't been gone a quarter of a hour before he came back tearing like mad, rattling something in the box, and the stay-lace woman, and the match gal, and two or three more from the steps where I used to sit, comin' up the stairs after him to tell me how he come there, and how they all knowed old Bardsley was in trouble."

"Well done, Jowler," cried Michael, patting him, "*he* carry coppers; why he deserves to have nothing but gold in his box to the end of his days."

"Come, old boy, we must be on the tramp, or little missis 'ull wonder what's come of us. Well, young man," he added, turning to Michael as he took Jowler's string, "I shall look in on yer master agen on Monday. Now, Jowler, not there. No pouncing, you rascal! Out, sir, out!"



PART IV.

CHAPTER XV.



*ND then I saw
them go on to
the mills, and
I heard my
father's voice
in the noise
of the sails."*

It was Tuesday morning, and the blind beggar's visit had been on Saturday, and had not been repeated; yet Michael found it impossible to think of him without

those lines from George Ambray's letter ringing in his ears.

He knew well that Bardsley was one of the people whom George had seen in his dream going to the mill with evil tidings of him. He had been unable for the last two days and nights to put from him a sense of George's being near; watching, as he had told Nora he had done in his dream, the threatened mischief to his name and the pure memories of him which lived about his home.

Michael could scarcely conceive an image more tragic than that of the returning prodigal held back by some implacable hand, while his sins alone should arise and go to his father.

Each day since he had first come to the mills his friendship for George had been strengthened. He had known him only in his shame and sorrow; but now the reality of what he was before was felt by Michael almost as well as if he had been familiar with him from childhood.

Bright and healthful memories of George were incessantly gushing up from the past and veiling Michael's stained image of him; gracing and purifying it as the waters of a fountain grace and purify a discoloured and mutilated statue over which they play.

Lamberhurst was full of him. There was scarcely a spot known to Michael which

Ambray had not pointed out to him as the scene of some wonderful performance of George's, or connected with him in one way or another.

That knoll between the pines was "where my son threw Marsham, the greatest wrestler in the country." And after hearing this, Michael never saw the knoll without seeing also a dim sculpturing of forms, among which one only stood out distinct—gladiator-like—beautiful, as the pale face he knew so well must have been in its bright health. The Long Ridge fields were where "that young rascal won the foot-race," and where now Michael could never look and not see the flying figure, the feet scarcely touching the sunny grass, the flushed face certain of success.

It had truly become to him more like an actual than an imaginary object, that figure which haunted Michael's paths, stealing upon him in all places, gliding over the grass in his white cricket shoes. At one time it would be as the admired young athlete, his eyes downcast with the graceful modesty of unrivalled power, at another as the calmly triumphant lover of Nora—so handsome that the vaguest smile, the simplest remark from his lips must needs, it seemed to Michael, be more winning than a year's courtship from one less gifted than this young ideal of his, this wonder growing upon him from the past, for ever increasing and strengthening those claims he already had on him.

Michael had made his hero out of somewhat common-place materials; but owing to the life he had led, which apart from his hard work, had been a very child's life, there was, perhaps, no kind of character so fitted at that time to fascinate his untought imagination as George Ambray's.

Michael had read so little, had associated so little with minds in a better condition than his own, that he was unfit—not through any natural grossness, but through simple inexperience—to understand, without help, a character whose worth was veiled under misfortunes, either physical or mental. Delicate shades, subtle intricacies were lost upon him; his mind required an idol made on the commonest principles of strength and beauty, and in George he had found this.

To him the ruin of such a man was more tragic than the ruin of a thousand ordinary beings—a thing to be tenderly hidden from

the world, and most of all from the eyes of those who loved him.

With such feelings in his heart for the absent and helpless, Michael could but regard the blind beggar's appearance at Lamberhurst with much dismay and foreboding, even after he had felt reassured as to his own identity remaining unrecognised by Bardsley.

On Monday night he began to hope that the rain, which had fallen heavily all day, would continue, and perhaps weary out the old man's patience, sicken him of his errand, whatever it might be, and cause him to return to his old quarters.

On Tuesday morning, however, he woke to disappointment, for he no sooner opened his eyes than he saw the upper half of the poplar at the corner of the mill-field stirring in golden light, tremulously—exultantly, like the wand of some wizard alchemist in a crucible when a long looked-for change has come. The first warm weather of the year had set in.

It was market day: and Ambray, Michael, and Ma'r S'one were going to the town on Mrs. Grist's business. In addition to her farm, mills, and hop-gardens, the miller's sister-in-law carried on a small corn-trade, to which Ambray had for many years lent a managing hand. Since his illness Mrs. Grist and the person whom she had put into the little corn shop at the Bay had so mismanaged things that on the day Ambray and his wife went to take tea at Buckholt Farm she begged quite humbly that he would resume his old duties. At first he declined doing so, but the remonstrances of his wife, Michael, and Ma'r S'one caused him to change his mind, and he promised to go to the Bay and look into things as soon as his health would allow him.

This Tuesday was the first market-day that he had found himself able to undertake the journey.

The three set off in Ambray's waggon drawn by two stout farm horses, Michael driving, and Ma'r S'one sitting at the back.

Ambray was very nearly as silent and depressed as his father's old servant, because as they started he had seen the meeting of Nora and some of her friends who had ridden over from the Bay to visit her, and the miller had thought she had blushed and brightened overmuch when General Milwood's nephew stood talking and laughing with her as he held down the fine, angry little head of his black horse. Reports of how much more time than usual this young gentleman had spent at Stone Crouch during Nora's visit there had come to Ambray's ears, and he did

not forget them as he watched Nora beating her pink palm with a rose and talking so animatedly.

Ambray had felt very angry with her as he drove out of the farm-yard, and during all the journey was as gloomy and jealous for George's sake as ever George could have been for his own.

"Look at her," he had muttered to Michael. "Silly flirt! How do I know but what my boy's prospects are going to the ground, being fooled, chattered, trifled away with every leaf of that rose? *Such* a jackanapes too! Ha, I'd like to lay my whip about his shoulders."

"It would be a bad move, master," answered Michael; "they have all their flour from us."

"I wish it may choke——"

"'Cline our 'erts!" murmured Ma'r S'one.

The thought that Bardsley's next, and perhaps last, visit to the mill would probably be while they were away was a source of so much satisfaction to Michael, that he enjoyed the journey as he had not enjoyed anything for many months.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was four in the afternoon by the market clock, when, the business of the day having been concluded, Ambray and Michael drove to the spot where they had arranged to meet and take up Ma'r S'one.

They found him waiting there. Ambray had fetched his coat, and was crossing towards the waggon, and Ma'r S'one was doing something to the harness at Michael's direction, when all three were caused to turn their faces up the street by a sudden cry.

It was not a cry of acute pain, fear, anger, or entreaty; it was not a cry wrung out by any sharp and sudden aggravation; it was rather such a cry as might come from a creature who, in the loneliness and darkness of night, when no earthly ear can hear, and when God seems further than the stars, sets free some misery that has lain gagged all day, and lets it wail aloud.

It was a girl's voice, and its youth made its anguish the more penetrating and strange.

It did not soon cease, but went on minute after minute till every one in the street stood still and turned and listened, while several hurried towards the spot from which the sound came.

Thus a little crowd soon shut from Ambray, Michael, and Ma'r S'one the object which they had seen when they first turned their faces and looked.

This was the figure of a girl standing at the edge of the kerb-stone with her hands stretched a little forward, the palms outwards, as if she were feeling for the wall on the wrong side of the pavement.

By the time Michael had consigned the reins to Ma'r S'one, and pushed his way with his master through the little crowd, the girl was sitting on the kerb-stone where she stood a minute before, and the cry that still came from her lips seemed duller and more monotonous.

She appeared to be about sixteen years old, and at a first glance Michael thought her but a commonplace, slatternly, ragged creature, differing little from thousands of others he had seen selling fruit and flowers in the London streets.

She was very slight, her ragged clothes hung on her as on a reed; but her face, though it was small, was not thin or pinched with want. The cheeks and lips were at this moment colourless, but it seemed as if colour had only recently left them.

The head from which the bonnet and hair-net had fallen was thrown back, the eyes were closed, the face was uplifted with an expression of intolerable misery.

The girl's clothes were dark and travel-stained, and her hair, of a pale and rare flaxen shade, looked strangely out of place upon her drawn-up brows and over her shoulders, which were pushed up by her hands being rested at either side of her on the low kerb-stone where she sat.

These hands were red and black, as were also the little bare feet resting in the road.

The outline of the up-turned chin was singularly perfect. It seemed, indeed, touched—as the sunshine fell on it—with a most tender spiritual beauty, which made one imagine that some unseen, angelic hand supported it; and kept this creature, so young and so helpless, from sinking utterly in those depths of anguish from which the voice—flowing drearily through the parted lips—appeared to come.

"What's this about? What's the matter with the girl?" asked Ambray of a commercial traveller who stood near him.

"Oh, she pretends she's just been struck blind."

"Pretends?" echoed Michael, indignant, though whether with the speaker or the girl he hardly knew.

"Struck blind," Ambray repeated; "what, just now?"

"Hush," said the commercial traveller. "Let us watch,—I fancy there'll be some

fun presently: that policeman has his eye on her. I fancy, from what he said, he knows her, and has seen this game before."

"Ah, the young baggage; is that it?" murmured Ambray, beginning to feel resentment at having been duped into a feeling of pity but for one instant; and, with a stern satire in his eye, he set himself to watch with the rest of the crowd—to watch and judge this most wicked impostor or most bitter sufferer, whichever she might prove to be.

She had arraigned herself, or fate had arraigned her, before a set of judges which, perhaps, represented the world about as faithfully as an ordinary court of justice does.

The larger part of the crowd had collected since Ambray and Michael had arrived at the spot; but those standing closely round the girl were simply the passengers through the street who had been all simultaneously stopped in their different pursuits and thoughts, and compelled, by this sad voice, to turn and fix their minds, one and all, on the same subject.

The number of these was about fifteen, and consisted of the commercial traveller, standing by Ambray; three friends, two of whom were poor-law guardians, and one an impressionable old gentleman, who boasted of never being deceived in his first impressions; the watchful policeman; a little tailor, going home disappointed of some money he had expected; a party of young ladies and gentlemen just returned from a yachting excursion; an old farmer and his wife; a clergyman; a tramp of doubtful character; and a little child about three years of age, standing with its finger in its mouth, and the exact same expression of rueful pity in its face as Ma'r S'one had on his as he turned round while standing holding back the powerful cart-horses, meek as lambs against his feeble arm.

The commercial traveller did not put any question to the girl, as most of the others did in turn, but stood prepared, as he had said, to enjoy the fun of seeing an imposture detected, an impostor hunted down. He was a hard-working, honest man, who lost something considerable yearly in actual pounds, shillings, and pence, through not departing a little from his own ideas of honesty. This loss was never absent from his mind, and the only compensation he found—for the world offered him no other—was dwelling on the sufferings of those who had not, like himself, chosen the straight

path. His virtue was as a wolf within him, demanding for its food the tears of detected vice. He was one of those men whom if placed among the sheep on Christ's right hand would find less reward in hearing the words "Come, ye blessed" than in listening to the "Depart, ye cursed" uttered to the goats on the left hand.

Next to this man stood Ambray, who hated law for the simple reason that it had always gone hand in hand with Mrs. Grist against him. This caused him, though his own judgment was hard against the girl, to regard the delighted excitement of his commercial neighbour with much disgust; and he could not help comparing him in his mind to a great blue-bottle fly buzzing with delight as he watched some feeble and pretty creature of his own species entangling itself in a spider's web.

The three friends stood nearest the vagrant—and of these it was the impressionable-looking gentleman who spoke to her most often, and who always appeared more and more convinced of her sincerity and innocence each time he spoke to her, whether she answered him or only continued her bitter crying.

His friends the poor-law guardians did not seem greatly impressed by his opinion. One—the perfection of whose health and toilet showed who and what had been his chief care through life—had clearly written on his handsome face an intimation to providence that, after such a winter as the parish had undergone, he should certainly expect this to prove a case for the prison authorities, and not for the poor-law board.

The person who leant upon his arm was also a rich man, but one who had grown cadaverous and hollow-eyed, and had sickened of his sumptuous fare, his purple and fine linen, in considering the sores and cries of those who came to ask for the crumbs that fell from his table. He was a charitable man whose charity had been much imposed upon; and as he stood looking at the girl none in the crowd doubted her more, and none were so anxious to believe in her and to give her assistance and comfort.

The policeman stood just behind the commercial traveller, whom he had taken into his confidence. With his hand on his hip, he listened with a smile of supreme contempt to all the questions, sharp or gentle, that were put to the miserable girl, and to the answers that she gave.

The disappointed little tailor, with the black cloth—in which he had just taken home

the work for which he had not been paid—twisted round his arm, stood a little aloof from the others, lost in thought. He was too humble-minded a man not to have accepted instantly the verdict of his betters; and one glance at the poor-law guardians, the policeman, and commercial traveller, had convinced him as to the depravity of the creature whose cries had stopped his feet on their sad journey homewards. But though he accepted the verdict undoubtedly, there was a furtive, frightened, but an almost fierce anxiety in his eye as to the judgment that was going to be passed on the offender. He had never seen her before, yet he was possessed by a feeling of which he was greatly ashamed, but which none the less held him to the spot—a feeling that there was no one in the world so well able as himself to offer evidence as to how easy might have been the slipping of these young feet, how terribly hard it is to resist the slime on want's steps when the head is giddy with hunger and the heart sick.

The yachting party had evidently enjoyed a gay little cruise, and were rather glad to hear and believe that the girl was an impostor, and that consequently there was no need for them to put aside their gaiety and look on the matter in a serious light.

The old farmer and his wife took the whole affair as one of the amusements of the town—a visit to which was an utter failure, unless it afforded some such sight. They only removed their spectacles from time to time to wipe them and put them on again, and begin the study of the town impostor with renewed zest.

The tramp of doubtful character apparently had many if not good reasons for keeping behind the policeman as much as possible. He looked very haggard and weary, and carried his boots over his shoulder on a stick that had as vagabond-like an expression as his face. His eyes remained fixed on the young girl, wistfully alert to meet her eye, and signal to her with as much force as could be thrown into a wink that, stranger as he was, he considered her game was up, and that the sooner she made off the better it would be for her.

The clergyman appeared also to have come to the conclusion that the girl was acting, but he seemed to be watching the little crowd about her with almost more interest than he looked at her. Perhaps this was because he knew most of these persons pretty well, and was wondering with melancholy interest which among them was fitted to cast the first stone.

He had not the pleasure of the commercial traveller's acquaintance, or doubtless he would have wondered no longer; for, though that gentleman was really too good-hearted to do personal violence to any one if he could help it, yet, as far as *right* went, he would assuredly maintain that he could take up the largest stone at hand and smite with clear conscience and unerring aim straight through the hypocrite's young bosom to her heart.

The little child and Ma'r S'one were the only ones who regarded her simply as being in trouble—who, without inquiring as to the why or the wherefore, turned to each other with faces that said only, with rueful sympathy—"Here are tears!"

"Come, my poor girl," said the impressionable gentleman, trying to control his excitement, and to speak calmly, as he bent down to her, "try and tell us more plainly how this came. Were you crossing the road—or were you here?"

The cry, without stopping, uttered the word—

"Here."

"You were standing or walking here a few minutes since, and could see plainly?"

The crowd closed a little to hear the words with which the cry, still unaltered in tone, was now burdened, and caught such sentences as—

"Oh this darkness! O father! father! Where is my father?"

"I shouldn't wonder if that ain't the old man's cue for coming on," whispered the policeman to the commercial traveller. "You'll see, sir, it'll be as good as a play afore long. The old raskill 'ull come fumbling along with his dog, and pretend to hear her all of a sudden, and call her, and find out she's just gone blind, and there'll be a fine scene between 'em. They've carried on the exact same game at Manchester, Birmingham, and half a score of other places; but we've got 'em now—we've got 'em!"

"You'll be fools if you haven't," observed the commercial traveller. "But the girl *is* blind, isn't she?"

"Yes, sir, bless you, blind as a bat, and always has bin."

"Can you tell us what there is opposite? What you saw just here before you lost your sight?" asked sharply the poor-law guardian, with the florid face.

"The gentleman might be sure she'd been well put up to all that," sneered the policeman.

"Rather!" agreed the commercial traveller. It so happened, however, that both found

themselves mistaken in this matter, for the girl began to murmur about things that were not in the street, and that, in fact, seemed to belong to another place altogether.

The policeman rubbed his whisker with a puzzled, uncomfortable air, these mutterings of churches and factories were not in his programme. He could not understand them.

The bitter voice, dull, monotonous, wailing, still flowed from the parted lips, and for a minute all again listened to it without interruption, while the sea, moaning at the end of the little street, seemed offering solemn attestation as to the truth and depth of its misery.

All this time Michael Swift had been looking on and listening with feelings more strong than any one's in the crowd.

Like the little tailor, his experiences had made him merciful and slow to condemn. Like the impressionable gentleman he was susceptible to the charm of soft flaxen hair and a lovely profile, and like Ma'r S'one and the little child, he could not unmoved see tears pour down like rain.

These weaknesses in his nature acting upon one another caused him to be seized more than once with a very strong wish that the commercial traveller or the policeman might do something that would give him a fair excuse for knocking one or both of them down.

"Now," he heard the policeman whisper as he stood watching them, "here comes the old scamp, sir. Now see if it don't all go just as I said."

Michael, turning to look in the same direction they were looking, saw coming quickly down the street a blind man and a dog, whom, with a sense of vague alarm, he instantly recognised as Bardsley and Jowler.

He glanced hastily from the old man to the girl, and fancied by her face she heard him coming. Her lips and closed eyelids trembled, and she grew much paler.

At first things went exactly as the policeman had prophesied.

The old man came along with a swinging, agitated step, stopping now and then to listen and tremble, and turn himself about with an air of great confusion and distress of mind.

At last he cried out passionately—

"It *is* her voice! Polly, my child, where are you?"

Then suddenly wringing his hands and appealing to the crowd, he cried—

"What is this? Why are you all gaping here? What has happened to my child?"

Why is she crying? Let me come to her. Oh let me come to her!"

The policeman and commercial traveller exchanged smiles as they parted to let him pass between them.

The impressionable gentleman hurried forward to meet the old man, and staying him by laying his hand on his tattered sleeve, explained to him hastily but gently what had befallen the girl.

To the infinite amusement of the policeman and commercial traveller, the profound admiration of the tramp, and the disgust of the little tailor, the blind man appeared to be terribly stricken by the story. He interrupted it constantly with bitter exclamations, by which he managed to make known that this calamity had been the great dread of his life since he had had his grandchild left solely in his charge and dependent on him; that she had been blind once for several years when a little child, but had been cured, though the doctors had warned him she might at any time lose her sight again suddenly. And now the dreaded blow had fallen! Now when he had not a farthing in the world to help her with.

"Let me pass, sir; let me go to my child!" he cried, waving his arms wildly.

"When are you going to put an end to this?" asked the commercial traveller. "To me it's a sort of blasphemy."

"Wait a bit, sir," whispered the policeman, with superior calmness. "Now hasn't it been almost word for word as I told you? Now, you'll see, sir, when he says, 'Polly, Polly, what is this?' the girl 'ull throw herself in his arms and shriek out, 'Daddy, I'm gone blind?' and make everybody cry."

"I have my pocket handkerchief ready."

"Well, I can tell you, you may want it, for she does it uncommon well, sir."

"I am ready."

So likewise is old Bardsley ready. He has made his way to his grandchild, has cried in his best style, "Polly, Polly, my child, what is this I hear?" and stands with his arms outstretched before her.

But here comes something that is not in the policeman's programme.

Polly does not apparently recollect her cue.

Instead of throwing herself in her grandfather's arms and crying, "Daddy, daddy, I'm gone blind!" she does no more than raise herself a little from the pavement by leaning on her hands; then seems to stiffen in all her limbs, while her white face stretches towards the old man, and her lips turn blue in trying vainly to speak.

Another instant and she has fallen to one side and rolled over in the road at Bardsley's feet.

With far less effective dramatic action than he has previously shown himself master of, the old man goes on his knees and raises her. The "Polly, Polly, what is this?" that he mutters in her ear now is not nearly so touching. The voice is sharp, husky, scarcely audible.

The crowd presses nearer. Bardsley turns his sightless face about wildly, for Polly is uttering strange shrieks, strange words. He tries to shut the voice up in the blue lips by holding them against his face, but it rings out wildly—shrilly.

"No more! No more! O daddy, I can't do it never, never, never more!"

"Hush, hush, Polly; Polly, hush!" mutters Bardsley. "She raves, gentlemen, she raves. This sudden affliction has turned her brain. There; quiet, Polly, quiet."

But Polly's fingers begin to clutch about him like a drowning creature's, and her lids open and show her sightless blue eyes rolling.

"Daddy, daddy!" she cries in great labouring breaths. "I seed fire I did—inside my eyes. Oh, I'll never, never! Oh, let me beg—beg all day—but never that—never!"

"Hush, Polly, hush! You wouldn't ruin—you wouldn't. Ah, gentlemen, her brain is gone!"

"Where's all them people? Where am I? Am I mad? I thought I was a-going mad, daddy, I thought—"

"Hush, child! Dear, good Polly—so good—so good to me. She wouldn't ruin me—she'll be quiet. Gentlemen, we will go home. I will take her home. She will be better at home."

Suddenly he seems to grow suspicious, and waving his disengaged arm with a passionate vehemence, cries hoarsely—

"Stand back, I say, and let me take her home! I want nothing of you—not I! I want to take my child home. What are you crowding for? Let me pass!"

The policeman looks back at another one who is waiting a little lower down the street, and who joins him when he has made his way to the blind man and girl.

The crowd closes round the group.

No outcry is heard, only an indistinct flood of protestation from the old man, and soon the little crowd parts, the four go very quietly down the street in the direction of the prison, the girl clinging to her grandfather, and looking white and terrified, but quiet and stricken with remorse, as if her

"STAND BACK, I SAY. AND LET ME TAKE HER HOME."

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mind had, under this new shock, recovered itself and become conscious of all that had happened.

The little tide of street life that had been stopped by Polly's voice flowed on its way again.

The impressionable gentleman, who had several times declared that he would stake his life on the truth of a girl with that face, went home too much depressed to speak to any one, feeling himself to have been thoroughly taken in.

The handsome poor-law guardian took his rich, cadaverous-looking friend home to dine with him, and rallied him with much lively grace of manner on his low spirits and poor appetite.

The commercial traveller went away with a smile on his face and Pope's line about an honest man on his lips.

The yachting party went home satisfied that there had been nothing worth making themselves miserable about.

The old farmer said to his wife—

"Now that's over, old woman, let's come and have a look through the telescope."

The clergyman went to wait for the policeman, that he might ask some questions about the prisoners.

The little tailor rolled his cloth round his arm very tightly and went quietly home, where he surprised his wife by sitting up the whole night, keeping her awake with his "stitch, stitch, stitch," and by being for many days so gentle, sober, and industrious, that, as she told her neighbours, she suspected him of having had a fright or a dream.

The tramp, when he saw Polly and her grandfather led down the street, had turned and looked after them till they were out of sight, then dabbed his palm flat against his eye, and went on his way muttering an oath.

Ambray, Michael, and Ma'r S'one, in rather dreary silence, got into the waggon and rattled away over the jolting High Street stones.

The little child left alone suddenly began to wonder what had made it cry; but failing to remember, sat down in the sun and began to sing and play with its toes.

CHAPTER XVII.

JUST twelve years before her cries had thus interrupted the business of the High Street at Bulver's Bay, Polly Bardsley had made one of a very different assemblage, and had had very different opinions passed upon her.

It was the day when her fate had been

decided—a day when after merciful hands having led her into a better path than she had yet in her blind infancy trodden, her wilful little feet had recklessly and passionately of their own baby will turned and fled back to the very path from which she had been drawn, and which had now led her to the prison where she sat—darkness in darkness stamped on her young face.

It was a grand day at the house where the child's kind patrons had placed her, and where she had been three weeks—that great house the space of which caused her to feel ready to cry whenever her small voice ventured forth and made known to her sensitive ear how very far the walls and floors and ceilings were asunder from each other.

A concert was being given by all the blind scholars for which this great house was built, and of which Polly was by many years, many inches, and many degrees the youngest, smallest, and most useless. She was the lowliest, too, by birth—a very sparrow of humanity, whose fall from light to darkness had been thus mercifully seen and noted by a Divine eye.

All the morning Polly, sitting winding cotton for the blind knitters, had heard the preparations for the great occasion going on.

The biggest room of all, where the great organ stood, had been filled with seats, and the two rooms leading out of that were arranged like a bazaar with the wonderful things Polly's blind schoolfellows had made—the mats, the brushes, the baskets, and the needlework, much of which was too delicate for her little fingers to be permitted to touch, and which she could only hear about till she cried with curiosity.

The blind girls and women had done each other's hair with ever so much more carefulness than usual, and chattered and laughed and wondered if this person and that person would be coming to the concert, till Polly likewise began to have small thoughts and hopes and tears of her own about the coming of a person whose existence in the outer world made that world seem all home to her, and whose non-existence in this place, where she was, made the comfortable house a wilderness.

She had gone into the great room with the others, and taken her place with the singers, under the organ; and all the seats were filled by the patrons of the place and their friends, and other ladies and gentlemen, and poor people too. The organ played, songs and anthems were sung, and speeches were delivered between whiles, setting forth now

much had been done for Polly and her schoolfellows, and how much more was going to be done; yet Polly's heart never knew one throb of gratitude, knew nothing, indeed, but wild throbs of wonder as to whether a certain wicked old man was here—was coming to her when all this should be over, to take her in his arms for one minute.

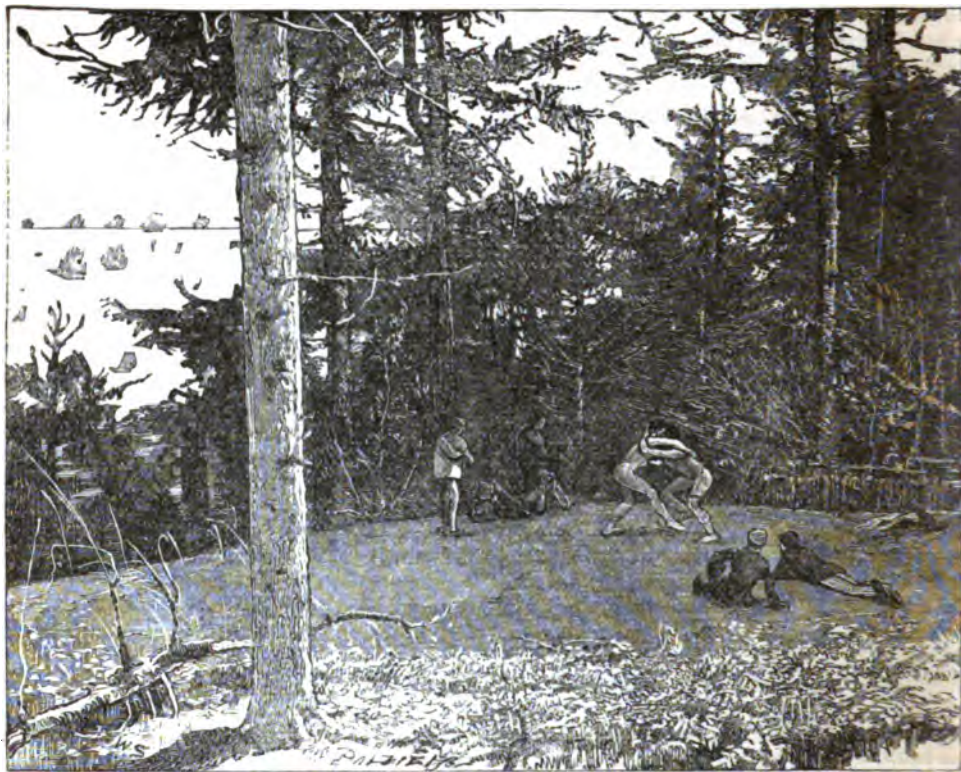
The old man was there, and was making himself a nuisance to his neighbours, by repeated inquiries as to whether they did not see a little child among the singers.

"Look agen, miss, *if* you please," he urged anxiously to the young lady sitting before him. "She *is* so uncommon small you'd hardly see her at fust."

To please him, the young lady rose, and said, as she sat down again—

"Oh yes, I do see a tiny child, quite a baby; a young woman is holding her hand; but she cannot be four years old, I think."

"Ah, that's her, miss, sure enough," said Bardsley. "Her years ain't took up much room in her. My little grandchild, miss."



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When the concert was over, and the people went to look at and purchase the school-work in the outer rooms, the same young lady and her blind brother encountered Bardsley buying himself a pair of warm socks and waiting—he informed them—till he might obtain permission to visit his little grand-daughter. They found the old man much distracted between parental affection and anxiety for the safety of his dog, whom he had left in charge of a boy outside the door, and whom he urgently commended to the notice of several persons as they left the building.

"Beg pardon, sir," he was saying to some one as they came up to him, "but would you kindly cast your eye round the toll-gate as you go out and tell the lucifer boy in charge of a small, long-legged tan dog that he's bein' watched, and 'ud better mind what he's about with that ere animal."

Half an hour later, when Mr. Bardsley's new acquaintances were waiting in a little parlour to see some one in the establishment with whom an appointment had been made, a blind lad appeared at the door with old Bardsley.

Not noticing their presence, he told the old

man to sit down, and his grandchild should be sent to him. Directly he had spoken, however, he knew that the room was already occupied, and apologised for the intrusion; but the young lady said she should be glad to see the little girl.

"But why is she here?" she asked. "Surely she is not blind with those pretty eyes?"

"Ah, but she is, miss," answered the beggar, and added, with a sigh, "and what makes it worse, miss, she ain't exactly a so-born, little Polly ain't, so it don't come nat'ral to her yet; but as she begins young, we must hope in time she'll overcome the dislike she 'as to it, and come to look on life as a step and a feeler—which as yet she don't, but runs and falls and knocks her precious little self about, and frets for her eyes as if they'd bin her mother and her father."

"But has she not a father and mother?" they asked.

"Father she's none, sir and miss," replied Bardsley; "and if I could say the same of her mother, better would it be for little Polly, though besides her she's got but me and Jowler in the world."

"She isn't kind, then—little Polly's mother?"

"She beat her, and would have starved her if that 'ud been easy, which it wasn't while Jowler and me could drag our limbs along. But for Jowler's box and my stiffikit, God knows where little Polly would a bin. Under the ground belike along with her father, my poor son, miss, a so-born like myself; took a fancy to by a sight-gifted young woman, as I was myself afore him. She broke his heart, miss—mainly with bad language to me and Jowler, and unpleasing reflections on the box and stiffikit in hard times. When Polly was born, and he heard she was sight-gifted, he took heart again wonderful, and made mats enough to carpet Jerusalem. We all strove for her, but it's hard work striving against a tartar, a drunkard, and a thief. At last she got herself took and transported, and Polly's sight went, and her father sunk under it all, and——"

Here Mr. Bardsley was interrupted by the opening of the door, and the entrance of little Polly herself.

The blind girl who brought her put her timidly into the room, and closed the door behind her.

Polly was indeed a small creature, whose every garment was in itself a wonder. A mere frill of preposterously few inches seemed her black skirt from her waist to the tiny

socks which, tiny as they were, found themselves too large to keep up round the little leg, in despair whereof they fell over the tops of Polly's well-worn boots, where they lay in a limp and helpless state. Little Polly assuredly did not possess the attractions which her grandfather hinted as having been the portion of himself and son. It might be said with some truth, perhaps, that the child's affliction was the only thing which then gave her significance.

Her grandfather had risen at her entrance, and now stood, hat in hand, waiting, listening for her approach as impressively as if she had been a duchess.

The child still remained on the same spot where she had been left, and where she stood with uplifted listening face and little hands clasped before her, patiently waiting that guidance without which she had not yet learned to move. It was touching to see them facing each other without knowing it, and waiting passively each other's assistance. At last the smallest voice imaginable inquired, with a sweet patience, "Is my daddy here?"

At this old Bardsley went to her as direct as if led by the truest of eyes, stooped, took her in his arms, and returning to his chair sat down with her while she lay upon his neck, an arm cast loosely over each shoulder, her face flat against his old coat, in what seemed to be an excess of peace and contentment rather than any childish emotion. Mr. Bardsley prided himself too much on his personal dignity to give way long to the feelings which had overcome him at the meeting with his little grandchild. Drawing down her hands, and seating her on his knee, he began to stroke her light hair with one hand, while he held her small chin in the other.

"You see here, sir, and miss," he said, "you see here a little creetur born to trouble if ever a creetur were."

And if ever a creature looked it, Polly did, with her meekly drooping head, her useless blue eyes, and her small mouth drawn up so tightly as if every breath of life had too sour a taste for it to take more than it found positively necessary.

"And is little Polly happy in this place?" asked the lady, scarcely knowing in what manner to reply to Mr. Bardsley's introduction of her.

A slight turn of the head and a faint flush showed Polly's ear as sensitive as her eyes were dull. She looked for one moment embarrassed and timidly inquisitive, but the next

the remembrance of the value of the few brief minutes she had to be with her grandfather came over her; and turning a stubborn little back towards the strangers, she devoted her whole attention to caressing his hands, his buttons, and his long grey beard.

"Come, come," said Bardsley, vainly endeavouring to make her turn her face, "speak up, pretty. Polly's nice and comfortable here, ain't she?"

Polly leant upon his breast that he might feel the meek little nod which was her answer.

"She has good wittles, eh?"

Polly nodded again.

"And she's a learnin' to read with her fingers?"

At this Polly lifted her head up with the injured dignity of one whose powers had been undervalued, and said, "I can read a lot, daddy, 'out my fingers, 'out a book at all, 'bout Jesus and Herod and Judee."

"Oh, ah, that ain't readin', that's knowin' by 'art, Polly," rejoined her grandfather. "But Polly's agoing to learn to read with her fingers all off pat without stopping, like old Ames that sits in the square with the big Bible, and mumbles the Scriptures when he hears anybody comin'. I dunno how his dog stands it. I know Jowler wouldn't. Well, and Polly stands up and sings with the rest of 'em. My gracious!"

Polly flushed with pleasure, and kissed the button she was fondling.

"Did hoo 'ear me, daddy? I sung in 'Joyful, joyful.'"

"Did I hear her! I shud say so, rather. Well if Polly didn't ought to be a proud and happy little girl!" said Bardsley. "Why, she's not got a thing to wish for."

This last proved an unlucky assertion, as it invariably is even to the most happy and grateful. It was certainly too much for Polly, "born to trouble." The little fingers engaged in trying to coax the worn covering back over one of Bardsley's buttons, of which they had felt the brassy nakedness, were slowly withdrawn. Slowly they clutched the wee skirt of Polly's black frock, and drew it up and found beneath it, safely attached by one corner, and illustrated with the legend of the rats who decided to bell the cat, a pocket-handkerchief.

It was a handkerchief which, in Polly's sight-gifted days, had been an inexhaustible delight to her and to Jowler; whose sagacity in discovering that it was *that* handkerchief and no other which he was expected to scratch and bark at when she shook it and

said, "Rats! rats!" had always concealed from Polly his utter want of appreciation of the artist's truth to nature. Now that the little washed-out relic of happier days could gladden Polly's eyes no more, she was content to keep it to dry them of their tears, of which they knew no few.

Trembling with that bitter charge of having nothing to wish for, Polly lifted the rats in council to her cheek, and, pressing close to her grandfather, sobbed with more passion than one would have thought sorrow had left in her—

"O daddy, daddy, I tood 'ike my eyes! I tood 'ike my eyes! and I wants to go home, and I can't stay here!"

The old man was much disturbed. He clasped her with arms that trembled, and rocked her against his breast, and the eyes which had never shed a tear over their own darkness, let fall some heavy drops for Polly's. Recovering himself very soon, and trying to make her sit up, he said—

"Come, come, Polly. Why, I never would have thought it. Fie, for shame; what will the young lady think of you?" And turning to her, he added apologetically, "She'll be herself again in a minute, miss. This is what comes of not bein' a so-born, you see."

It did not seem that Mr. Bardsley's prophecy was likely to be very soon fulfilled, for Polly continued crying bitterly in spite of attractions offered her in the shape of a watch held against her ear, a cake put into her hand, and sundry articles from her grandfather's pockets picked up in his street wanderings. Her crying would probably have brought some one into the room soon and caused a sudden and sad ending to her grandfather's visit, if there had not presently arrived a comforter whose loud scratching and barking outside the door made everybody start, and was instantly recognised by Polly.

"O daddy," she cried, sitting up joyfully, "it's Jowler! it's Jowler!"

"Upon my soul if I don't believe it is," said Bardsley with much alarm; "there'll be a nice set out!"

The young lady, who was not so fearful of offending against the rules of the establishment, opened the door, and in burst Jowler.

Polly slid from her grandfather's knee, and meeting her old friend half-way, sat down on the floor to receive his wild caresses, which she answered with smiles and soft little pats. She seemed to think his frantic joy quite accounted for by his possession of that sense of which she was deprived; for as she gently restrained him she said with a tender envy in her voice:—

"Jowler, Jowler, *dear* Jowler, you *are* pleased. You *see* me, don't ycu, Jowler?"

By degrees she got him quiet, so that she might feel him all over, to assure herself he was in nowise changed from the Jowler her eyes had loved.

Jowler stood with lolling tongue gazing round from the corners of his eyes with utterable affection on the little hands that were so inconveniencing him, and submitted to their examination with quite superhuman patience till they came round to his tail, when he offered a gentle but decided resistance.

"And he's bin a good Jowler, has he?" inquired Polly, holding up her favourite by the front paws.

During the twelve years that had intervened between this visit of Bardsley to the blind-school and his visit to the High Mills, some three or four Jowlers had worn out their lives in the old man's hard service. Of these it was in all probability the Jowler of Polly's infancy who was the true hero of the story that had been related to Michael Swift, though Bardsley was in the habit of applying it to any dog who happened to be in his service. The vices and virtues of a live dog must, he reasoned, inevitably be of more interest to the public than those of a dead one; and if he could amuse the public, and even edify it, as he sometimes believed he did by his anecdotes of dog-life and dog-character, he did not see that he harmed any one by letting his hearers believe that they had the true hero of those anecdotes before them. For this reason he had found it necessary to keep to the same name.

When Polly asked about Jowler's behaviour since her absence from home, Bardsley told the story of the "pouncing" and the "stiffikit" in nearly the same words in which he told it to Michael twelve years later.

While he did this Polly sat quiet with a patient, half-weary look on her face. Even in those days it was an old, old story to her.

At the moment when Jowler, after the recital, was receiving the pats and applause of all present, the young woman who had brought in little Polly came back to summon her to tea, and to inform Mr. Bardsley that the doorkeeper was waiting to see him out.

The little one had her arms round Jowler's neck when the summons came. In an instant she was up, kneeling on her grandfather's knee, her hands clutching him tightly.

"Tea, eh?" said he, making a bold effort to quiet her emotion by seeming not to share or

perceive it. "Buns, too, I bet a penny, as it's high day and holiday. My little Polly havin' tea and buns along of a lot of ladies and gentlemen. What yer think o' that, Jowler?"

Jowler only wagged his tail with a pre-occupied air, for he was intent on a bag of biscuits on the table.

"I *doesn't* want tea, and I *doesn't* want buns—I wants you and Jowler," was Polly's cry of misery; and she clung and pressed against the beggar's tough old heart till its slow beating quickened painfully.

Afraid of trusting himself to comfort her, he rose and gave her into the girl's arms just as she was, in her tears and struggles, and she was carried out.

Her grandfather adjusted the string round Jowler's neck, and gave him to understand, by the roughness of his touch, that he was again on duty; that sentiment had been banished with little Polly, and the hard business of life was now to begin.

Polly was put to bed long before it was dark. She knew it was not near night by the talking and the laughter in the work-rooms, and by the vague red glare she saw when she turned towards the windows, for as yet Polly could tell light from darkness, and sometimes see a form or a colour suddenly, and generally but for a moment.

She could not rest. The day's excitement, the joy of meeting Bardsley, the sorrow of parting from him, the playing of the organ, as she had stood so close under it, the overmuch wandering and ruminating alone which she had had that day, the crowds, the many voices, the unusual influence of strong tea and coffee which had been given her instead of milk and water on this great and confusing occasion, all acting together on little Polly's weak brain and passionate heart, made sleep impossible—bed a rack.

She got up and crept to the door, from the door to the top of the stairs, and stood listening.

People were walking about still, the organ was playing, the great front doors were open, wheels were noisy in the streets, little children shouted and laughed there—ah, how free and happy Polly thought them! Why should she not go down the stairs and slip away through the great doors—away for ever from this grand place with its awful organ—this wide-roomed house so clean, so good, so dull, so miserably strange? Would any one notice her? All seemed so busy. There were many little girls come with the visitors;

she might be taken for one of them if she slipped out quietly, but then she must put on her clothes, for no little girl would be there in her night-dress, Polly remembered.

She ran back and dressed herself as well as she could, then went to the stairs again, and listened.

Bardsley shared the room which he had occupied since Polly's birth with a bird-seller, known among his friends by the name of "Traps." It happened that on the night of Polly's grand day this person was obliged to be up late, painting two green-finches to sell in the streets as valuable foreign birds. Bardsley, being nothing loth to have some one to whom he could describe the grandeur of Polly's school and Polly's prospects, had kept his friend company; while Jowler, a miracle of patience and self-sacrifice, sat winking and gaping between the two, and trying hard not to look at the birds, which he had had the mortification of seeing fattening for sale on hemp-seed for the last week.

"Traps," said Bardsley, suddenly interrupting himself in his description of Polly's delight on meeting him, "that's the second time I've heard it."

"Heerd wot?" inquired Traps, holding off the painted finch by the feet, and contemplating it with the eye of a connoisseur, while Jowler retired, sick with temptation, to the farthest end of the room.

"That noise," said Bardsley, rising; "like a lot o' people down at the door. There! they're on the stairs; they're a-coming up; they're coming here."

Traps uttered an exclamation which implied their coming was the reverse of welcome to him, and, thrusting the bird into its cage, covered his paints with Bardsley's old woollen comforter, and took up his pipe.

Meanwhile Bardsley opened the door, and found the whole houseful of lodgers crowded round a policeman, who had something in his arms.

It was Polly; and Traps, listening sulkily, made out from the confusion of tongues that she had been found feeling her way along by the pailings, half a mile down the road where the school for the blind was, that she had given her grandfather's address with extreme exactness, and demanded with great energy to be taken there and nowhere else.

Bardsley, with a strange expression on his

face, came and took Jowler's money-box, and emptied out all its contents into the policeman's hand.

He then brought Polly in, and shutting the door in the face of all who would fain have entered and heard the story of her return, stood her on the floor, and seating himself remained for a moment with his face buried in his hands.

Traps caring only that the people had gone, and that the door was shut, opened the cage and resumed the bird and the paint-brush, observing with complacency—

"If this ain't took for a Java sparrer, it'll be 'cos there never was no Java sparrer to come up to it."

"Polly," said Bardsley, suddenly lifting his face, "come here!"

She went and placed her hands upon his knees.

Polly had in her hasty dressing been unable to fasten her clothes round her shoulders, so that Bardsley drawing her to him found them bare. He began to beat them with so heavy and passionate a hand, that Traps in his astonishment obliterated a scarlet spot he had made with great effect on the green-finch's wing, and stared round.

"Traps!" cried Bardsley, almost fiercely, as he stood trembling over Polly when she had cast herself, stricken with terror and exhaustion, at his feet. "Traps, you are a witness as I have done my dooty by this child. I moved the world to get her in that place—you know it, Traps—and now when she's wickedly run away, I've beat her—I've beat her till she's dropt. You see it, Traps, if that ain't dooty I'd like to know what is! But now that's over come to me, my precious—my darling! and let what can part us two agen."

"Ah, Traps! it's no good goin' agen fate. She was born to trouble—which means to me. I tried to put her away from trouble and from me, but it don't do, you see, Traps—it don't do."

The old man put forth the same plea on that night twelve years afterwards, when Polly had cried herself to sleep upon the prison straw, and his own heart and brain were restless and tormenting.

"I tried to put her away from it all," he kept crying inwardly, "but it didn't do—Traps knows it didn't do."

PART V.

CHAPTER XVIII.



BEFORE it was light the next morning Bardsley was disturbed by his granddaughter being brought to his cell.

She had been locked in for the night with three drunken and riotous women, who towards morning had quarrelled so violently that Polly had been frightened, and had wakened

the gaoler by her entreaties to be let out; he, not knowing where else to put her, and remembering Bardsley was alone, had brought her to him.

Polly was much too weary to be capable of showing her gratitude for the change in any other way than falling into a peaceful sleep.

When this had lasted about two hours Bardsley began to have little fits of coughing, to walk about and stumble, as if he wished to waken her without seeming even to himself to do so purposely.

It was necessary that Polly should begin without loss of time to receive her instructions as to how she must behave when they should be taken before the magistrate, how she must swear to having suddenly lost her sight at such a time and in such a place, and how she must guide her statement according as the evidence for and against them should go. Perhaps she would have to swear to having lost her sight before in one or more of those towns which might send witnesses against her, and consequently swear to having recovered it again as many times as might be necessary.

Bardsley had during his sleepless night thought out all Polly's lesson with much diligence, and was impatient to teach it to her before they were disturbed.

He had never felt himself so much to blame before, as he did for having been so carried away by the repeated successes of Polly's street scene as to venture it here, so near to the High Mills, which formed the real aim of his and Polly's pilgrimage, whereon they had found their daily bread in this

fearful manner. The story that he had come to tell the miller of Lamberhurst would assuredly have to remain untold if Polly and he were to be proved guilty in this town. There would have to be months, or, likely enough, years of waiting, until the case should be forgotten—and perhaps it might never be forgotten in such a place as this. He felt, on considering all these things, that his hopes and the future he had pictured for Polly must indeed be ruined unless his own cunning and good luck should bring them safely out of the dangers into which his hardihood and Polly's "fit" of yesterday had thrown them.

But if Polly would learn her lesson well, if she would but wake free from all the excitement and confusion that had seized her yesterday, Bardsley believed he could so manage their case that, however much might be suspected, nothing could be actually proved against them. It was the old man's besetting fault to put too much faith in his own wits and the gullibility of the world; and sharp experiences of its dangers had not in the least degree tended to cure him of this fault.

The straw on which Polly lay was spread upon the stone floor, and on this Bardsley at last sat down beside her, to wait for her awakening, and gently to hasten it by passing his hand over her face and hair.

He had not done so many times when his fingers began to tremble. He withdrew them, and sat with his head bent and his face darkening.

It was not that the coldness of Polly's cheek had made his heart misgive him for her health's sake; he knew by her gentle breathing, and the moisture on her brow, she was recovering from the shock of yesterday, as she had recovered from so many similar shocks before. It was, that his fingers had gone to her face as, but for his blindness, his eyes would have done, full of the question—Would it all be well with Polly when she should wake? Would she perjure herself this time meekly and obediently as she had done before? He had asked this as he touched her, and had taken a chilling answer from her face. He had seemed to feel something like severity in the cold and still repose of the eyelids and the mouth—something that made him fancy Polly had not wholly returned to her usual meek and dependent

spirit—that she had things in her mind, in her dreams, strange to him and against him.

Again he touched the mouth he had fed so long with the wages of his blindness and beggary, and again it seemed strange to him and chilled him. Its perfection felt to him like the seal of truth upon it—cold, firm, unbreakable. Bardsley was imaginative and superstitious, but he thought this had nothing to do with his fears concerning Polly. He thought, with his usual self-conceit, that he had the power of feeling expression, and that Polly's face was expressing some thought or dream injurious to him.

He got up and moved to and fro in the cell with confused and unsteady feet, but in less than a minute came again to where his grandchild lay, and crouching down beside her, his hands clutching each other tremblingly, he uttered her name in a voice hoarse with superstitious fear.

"Polly!"

She woke, and rose up on her elbow.

To see Polly's awakening on this or almost any morning was to guess at what was generally regarded as another misfortune in her almost as great as her blindness, but which was perhaps the chief blessing with which the child had been endowed.

Polly had not nearly an ordinary share of sense. It was as if her Creator, considering into what evil and unclean company her mind would fall, had mercifully kept it as a bud never to expand; closed tightly to all cankerous things and baleful airs, so that day after day it might be steeped in mire which should fall from it, leaving it unsullied and pure at heart; for with Polly it was very seldom that anything sank deep or rankled. She scarcely had even memory to trouble her. Sleep would generally banish from her any day's sorrow, and leave her spirit fresh and bright as a blade of grass which the drop of dew all night upgathered on its point has fallen over in the morning and left glistening.

There were times when it seemed, as by some magic touch, to open for a little while and be penetrated by a mysterious vague sense of the misery by which it was surrounded. It was one of these unwonted fits that had seized it yesterday and tilted Polly's cry—began in hypocrisy—with such true and bitter anguish.

When Bardsley called her, she woke at once as innocently and brightly as anything on earth might wake, rising towards him, smiling, and stretching her little hand, the substitute for her blind eyes, to his face.

He could know nothing of how sweet her

pretty, rich-fringed eyes were, or how the sunshine glorified her hair, claiming it—all abased and trailed on prison stones though it was—as one of the shining treasures of the morning and the spring; but her waking and her touch comforted him greatly.

"I'm glad you've slept well, Polly," he said, trying to maintain a dignified composure of countenance under her attentive fingers as he sat down at her side, and laid his hand on her shoulder. "I'm very glad, indeed; for there ain't nothing I like sleep to shake a person together agen, when they've shook themselves to pieces, as you did yesterday—both your own self and me, Polly. I ain't slept at all, now, all night—not a wink; it warn't in me; but I'm truly glad as you could, Polly—truly glad."

And Bardsley sighed with a sort of philosophical resignation, as if adding mentally, "So is it ever in this world—the innocent must suffer for the guilty."

His voice and his words brought all the bitter truth at once into Polly's mind. With it came also one of those strange, brief flashes of inner sight which allowed her to see herself and her life.

Her morning freshness and cheerfulness were gone. Horror and self-pity came over her, her eyes filled with tears, and she threw herself face downwards on the straw and began a dreary wailing, which moved Bardsley with impatience and irritation.

"Oh well, if that's to be it, Polly," he said in a voice sternly contemptuous, "I must let things go as they will. It's no good one strivin' and strainin' while t'other lays down and howls. Now I tell you once for all, Polly, if this goes wrong with us, as you seem set on letting it, I'm done for. I could ha' wished to see you better provided for, afore I meets your poor father, but my efforts for you, Polly, is come to a end, if the worst comes to the worst on this occasion. I'm an old man, Polly, which on account o' the energy I puts out for your sake you're apt to forget; but age is age, and can't stand a blow like this."

Here Bardsley tried the effect of a little smothered but very audible sobbing himself.

Polly's wailing ceased; the weary, downcast little form drew itself up and nestled at his side. The hem of Polly's wretched gown was applied with gentle vigour to Bardsley's eyes—an attention as unpleasant to him as it was unnecessary, but which he bore with Christian fortitude, and rewarded Polly for by receiving her somewhat stiffly in the arm against which she leaned.

"I don't want to scold you, Polly. I'm

well aware as you're not strong, and can't reckon on your mind in the right place and the right time, and it ain't for *my* sake but your own hintirely as I could wish for you to break off this sort o' childish way you has of roaring out over a bit o' trouble which, as I've told you often, is a thing as we're all born to, an' as runs in your own family most perticklerly. I ain't bin able, it's true, to give you such a edgercation as you'd had if you'd stayed at the place I moved the world to get you inter; but I do take credit to myself, Polly, for trying to keep you well up in one lesson as I've learnt by harder ways than I've tried to learn it to you—a lesson, Polly, as the teachin' of is much neglected in all circles—and that is, the *accepting* of trouble as a *fact*, as a thing you must expect to meet anywheres and everywheres, as certainly as a party you might 'appen to owe a small sum to—as take the case of the ketch-em-alive-O man I borrowed sixpence of last June, where could I turn a corner without finding myself stuck to his fly-papers? But I expected him, Polly, and dodged him as I'd have you expect and dodge trouble, which is as real and sticky as fly-papers, and, no doubt, set by a judicious providence as knows it wouldn't do for us to be all in the sugar-basin at once."

Polly listened meekly, thankful to hear the old man fall into his habitual preaching tone to which she was so well used. But Bardsley, at the first pause he made, became aware of how he had been wasting the few precious moments which remained for him to teach Polly her part in the day's performance.

He erected himself with as much dignity as he could in his lowly position on the floor, and assumed a brisker tone.

"But what I was goin' to say to you, Polly, is, as it's of the most wital importance as you shud rec'lect to-day, you are no longer a child, but a growed-up young woman with responsibilities, with more responsibilities—some desirable, others not—than most young women of your age."

Polly sighed. She knew that it boded no good to her when Bardsley began to speak of her responsibilities—knew well it was a token that some unpleasant task was about to be assigned to her.

Bardsley began at once to make known to Polly what he had so carefully considered as best for her to do and say. He restrained his usual volubility, and managed to convey his thoughts and wishes, or commands, very simply and clearly to Polly, so that she could not fail to unders. and him.

When he had finished he did not feel any surprise at finding her silent and motionless for some minutes, for he knew that Polly often hesitated to speak too quickly, for fear he should charge her—as he often did, and justly—with answering from her quick heart without having received the sense of what he had said into her slow mind at all.

He waited patiently.

At last the thought of how many minutes must have passed since the ceasing of his own voice, troubled him suddenly. The doubts he had felt, the strange fear he had had when he touched her face, as she slept, returned to him all at once as the strangeness of her silence came over him like a bitter chill.

Why, he wondered, did he hesitate to speak to her, to stretch his arm towards her? He could not tell, but he did hesitate till the silence lengthened painfully.

At last he moved his arm, and found that she had gone away from his side. Then a cry with anger in it as well as fear broke from him.

"Polly, why don't yer answer me?"

Straining his ears as he half sat, half lay with his face stretched forward, he heard her quick, excited breathing.

"Answer me, Polly," he cried less angrily, more beseechingly. "Tell me as you'll do what I said you must do. Answer me."

From the corner towards which a vague instinct had caused him to turn his face Polly's voice came at last, low, so low he could but just hear it, and heavily burdened with misery—

"I can't do it, daddy. I can't swear as I seed the light."

The voice seemed to creep tremblingly along the prison floor, so that he knew Polly was cast down in great distress in that corner to which she had taken herself.

"Who is it," he asked hoarsely, "a-speaking to me like that? It's never Polly?"

"I can't swear as I seed the light; it is me as ses it, daddy."

"It is I!" cried Bardsley, quivering on his elbow, and speaking in a voice of solemn anger. "Then what evil speret is a-tempting of you to speak and to be'ave like this, Polly, in return for all I've done for yer?"

Polly was silent. She could not tell him what spirit it was. She could not understand herself, and was still less able to describe to him these moments of mental and spiritual seeing; when she beheld her wretched little life with such passionate consternation, counting up her miseries, and making moan

over herself as some opium-dulled mother, free for a few moments from her stupor, might wail over her starving and ill-used babe.

Polly was not moaning now; her tears were falling fast and silently on the thin little arms that pillowed her face as she lay cast down upon the stones.

"Come, Polly," said Bardsley in a conciliatory but intensely anxious voice, "you've got one of your crazy fits on—throw it off, Polly, throw it off."

It was one of Polly's trials to have these times of terrible sanity called madness—for Bardsley never thought them anything else, though often during them she wailed out some bitter truth to him.

The only answer that she could make now was a repetition of the cry—

"Daddy, I can't swear as I seed the light."

"So," said Bardsley, after remaining some time in angry silence, "Polly is a-goin' to ruin her old grandfather, is she? And for a whim—a fit o' nonsense?"

"No; it's 'cos I can't, daddy—I can't swear as I seed the light."

"And why can't yer, you unnatural, wicked gal? Why can't yer? Don't roar; but answer me why can't yer?"

"'Cos I'se afraid as God a'mighty won't never again let me see if I do—if I swears I 'as when I 'asn't."

By the burning of Polly's cheeks in uttering this it might have been a most shameful confession. It required no little bravery on her part to utter it; for she knew it would bring Bardsley's ridicule upon her, as indeed it did, promptly and bitterly, in a laugh and an oath together.

At this she sobbed aloud.

"'Nough o' that row, now!" cried Bardsley sternly. "I see wot it is—it's that confounded school nonsense a workin' in yer 'ead. Now, Polly, is it possible as you can't yet bring yer mind to understand wot I've told yer so many times as to the subject' of the same religion not being conformable to all speres o' life? Now, I arst yer to put it to yerself like a sensible gal, Polly. Take the case of a—a—a statement of a fact as isn't a fact. Well, now, do you mean to say on yer honour, Polly, it's the same thing whether it's done ter save a person from ruin, or whether it's done by a fine lady in her drarin'-room 'earin' a double knock at the door, and reflectin' she ain't got her best cap on, or fancyin' she got a glimpse out o' winder of an old gown as she gave seven year ago to a poor relation as may ha' come

down thinkin' it's time the bounty was rennoed? Now, I arst yer, Polly, do you think it's the same?"

As Polly at the best of times was incapable of argument, she did not attempt any answer to this perplexing question.

"Depend on it, Polly," continued Bardsley, "God a'mighty 'ud a great deal rayther you'd save your old grandfather from ruin than be a-puffin' up yer 'cart with religion at such a ilconvenient time as this. I'd always have yer say yer prayers, Polly, and believe in a Providence above as wisits awful retribution on all as furgits the blind, or in anyways worrits 'em, and as 's something to look to when all else fails. But fur people in our station to be expectin' to keep to a religion which I've heered is as much or more than them in the 'ighest circles can live up to, why it's rank presumption, Polly, and nothink else."

If continuing in the same determination might be called presumption, Polly remained presumptuous still, for Bardsley had no sooner ceased speaking than she again put forth her feeble, drawling, but obstinate cry—

"I can't swear as I seed the light!"

"Then don't!" shouted Bardsley fiercely. "Ruin yerself and ruin me, you—"

And he launched at Polly such a selection of epithets as none but one brought up like herself, with very free and liberal ideas of language, could hear without horror. Even with these ideas Polly was much shocked and shaken; for it is certain that the accepting a vocabulary as being right and proper, and the having its hardest words hurled at oneself, are two very different things. A more piteous lamentation arose from her corner, and Bardsley's fierce abuse smouldered down to a low and ominous muttering.

Suddenly he got up and felt his way to the corner where Polly was.

"Polly," he said, holding his rage in strong control as he stood over her, "as nothing else can turn you from this wicked state o' mind, I shall be compelled to tell yer what I didn't wish to say nothing about to yer yet, but now I can't 'elp myself; so set up and stop this howling, and I'll tell yer what I have brought yer down to this—place for."

Polly sat up.

"Are you a-listenin'?" asked Bardsley sharply.

"Yes, daddy."

He paused for some time, leaning his shoulder against the wall.

"I 'spose you ain't guessed at all wot I did come down here for, Polly?"

"No," answered Polly with a sigh, which

seemed to express a heartfelt opinion that, whatever the journey was for, it had been a great mistake.

"Well, I've come after that scamp," said Bardsley, "that's wot I've come after, Polly."

He bent his head, endeavouring to detect by breath or movement any effect his words might have had on Polly.

An unnatural stillness was over the little form at his feet. Whether it denoted surprise, consternation, pleasure, or indifference Bardsley could not tell.

"Did you hear me, Polly?" he asked. "Do you understand where we're a-goin' when we git out of here?"

"Jigh Mills," answered Polly in a weary voice that might have come from one thrice her age.

"Exactly so," said Bardsley.

He waited then for something more from Polly, but she remained silent.

He was clearing his throat preparatory to giving her more information concerning the purport of their journey, when he felt Polly's hands flung on his feet, and heard her voice choked with sobs, crying—

"Don't, don't, don't, daddy! Don't go there; don't go there, and I'll swear I seed the light; only don't go there, don't go there."

Bardsley drew back a step.

"Polly," he said sternly, "I don't know you: there's nothink of you left but whims."

He was agitated, and spoke only to hide his agitation. He *did* know her at that moment as well as he knew himself. He understood, much too well for his peace of mind, the kind of struggle that was making her writhe at his feet.

He knew that every instinct of self-respect or honour which her hard life had left in her would be moved to strong and bitter rebellion against the threatened visit to the Mills—and he knew how much too simple she was to perceive that, remaining true to her purpose of not swearing that she had recovered her sight, was the surest way of preventing this visit.

But though for a little while Bardsley was moved by this simplicity in her, he did not scruple to take cruel advantage of it, as it was for this very thing that he had made what would appear to be so unwise a revelation to Polly.

"Very well, Polly," he said, crouching down and patting her shoulder, "then that's our bargain, eh? You swears us out o' this like a brave good lass as you are, and has yer own way ever after."

Polly submitted to his conciliatory pats like a lifeless creature. She was so strange

that he judged it best to say nothing for several moments.

He had no pangs of conscience in thus cheating one whom it was so very easy to cheat, but reasoned with himself that weak things like Polly were not to be managed at all without such stratagems.

What was she doing, he wondered, with her face down against the stones, so silent and so still? Taking leave, perhaps, of that far-away, strange thing she called the light, which she thought she must no more hope to see after this day when her lips were to swear falsely concerning it.

"Innercint little fool," thought Bardsley, sending up his ragged coat cuff to do his eyes a necessary service, "as if—if there *was* anythink to pay for this sort o' thing—Providence wouldn't send in the bill ter *me*; and a long un it 'ud be—Lord 'elp me!"

While he was waiting and listening for Polly to move, he heard the sound of keys rattling and bolts being drawn in the direction of the front of the building. Apparently some doors were opened, for immediately afterwards the sound of a fine organ penetrated to the cell where they were.

Bardsley knew it was the old organist practising in the church on the other side of the narrow street in which the prison stood. He and Polly had been humbly admiring listeners to this early performance every morning since their arrival at Bulver's Bay. Indeed, the old man had found it rather a profitable kind of amusement, for the organist was only too happy to buy a pennyworth a day of such profound and ecstatic admiration as the blind man's face and waving hands testified, while Polly drooped and wept with childish memories, or lifted up her face sweet and smiling with a renewal of childish hopes, and Jowler outside in the churchyard stood first on one tombstone and then another in sculptural attitudes, trying to see in at the windows, wondering what was going on, and having a gnawing suspicion of breakfast.

When Bardsley heard the grand sound coming as the angel came to Peter, calmly triumphant over bars and bolts and all prison fastnesses, he growled a curse upon the white-haired player, for he knew it would disturb Polly again with thoughts of her babyish school-days.

He was not wrong. In a minute she lifted her face from the stones. She rose to her elbow—to her knee—to her feet, pausing to listen between each movement.

She stood listening, her arms crossed, a hand laid on each shoulder, hugging the

memory of that little pure white cape of the blind-school uniform, which might have kept the wilful heart as pure, had she not cast it off so wantonly.

Bardsley knew, felt fully how excited she was growing, and expected each instant she would cry out to him and give him more trouble.

She did cry out, in mingled passion, misery, and triumph, but not to him.

"O our Father!" cried Polly, "Our Father 'chart'n 'eaven! I won't swear as I seed the light!"

At that moment Bardsley heard the rattling of keys close outside the door, and voices, from which he made out that the gaoler had brought himself into trouble by placing them together.

The door was presently opened, and then the glory of the angel that had come to Polly's succour rushed in and filled the cell.

Bardsley leapt to his feet, blaspheming and stretching out his arms, more in impotent desire to wrestle with those sweet and powerful sounds for possession of Polly's tender spirit, than to offer any resistance to the men who had come to take her weary form away from him for but an hour or two.

Another moment and the door was closed again, and a lonely mass of rags lay heaving on the prison floor.

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE evening, about a week after their visit to Bulver's Bay, Michael shut up the mill early, whistled to Keeper, and went some miles along the Tidhurst road to meet and walk home with Ma'r S'one, whom he expected to be returning about this time.

The old man had been sent off to Tidhurst cattle fair early that morning, greatly over-burdened and saddened by the charge of a fine hog of fourteen stone, which, in consequence of a suspicion of measles, Mrs. Grist had desired to have sold immediately, and at its fullest price.

He appeared to be greatly surprised and touched by Michael's attention in coming to meet him and relieving him of some heavy farm implements which he had had to purchase at Tidhurst and carry home.

As they walked along together, Ma'r S'one's repeated sighs and solemn shakes of the head led Michael to fear that he and his errand had met with the very worst of bad luck, and that he had real cause for being alarmed at meeting Mrs. Grist. He forebore questioning him, feeling sure it would not be many minutes before the old

man would confide his trouble to him. Without seeming to loiter for him he suited his strong step to Ma'r S'one's uncertain, plodding trot.

"Stopped at th' aarf-way 's' aafternoon, Ma'r Michael," he began presently, evidently finding walking and talking at once a great labour, and more than his breath could manage without much trouble.

"Ah," said Michael, well knowing that Ma'r S'one alluded to the old half-way house between Lamberhurst and Tidhurst, where the coaches used to stop before the railway came to Bulver's Bay. "Well, you're no bad judge, Mr. Ma'r S'one. Old Piggot's ales the best in Southdownshire. When I go by every Wednesday I have a glass regularly."

"Ay, ay, I thart ye did," said Ma'r S'one, with a little sudden, sprightly mischief in his eye and voice. "I thart ye did, Ma'r Michael."

"You thought I did? Why, how in the world should you know?" asked Michael.

"I wur round there with your maister in the waggon o' Friday mornin'," answered Ma'r S'one, shaking his head slyly; "and Fleetfoot he drared up grandly at th' aarf-way—grandly, he did."

While Michael wondered for some minutes why Ambray had not spoken to him concerning Fleetfoot's revelation, Ma'r S'one relapsed into his former sadness—the sighing and the shaking of the head recommenced.

"Yees," he began again after a little while, "I stopped at th' aarf-way 's' aafternoon."

"Ah, by-the-by, so you said," answered Michael encouragingly.

"'Arry Piggot carled me in, and there were a chaap there a-read'n' out the noospaper. O they be arful, they papers—arful."

"What was the matter this afternoon?" inquired Michael.

Ma'r S'one sighed heavily, and answered in a trembling voice—

"T'wur 'bout that poor blind cretur'."

"Who! The girl we saw on Tuesday?"

"Ay; they've give 'em six weeks ave it, Ma'r Michael."

"Six weeks of it!" repeated Michael. "Have they now? Well, I suppose that old rascal deserves it. I suppose they both deserve it—don't you think so yourself, Mr. Ma'r S'one?"

Michael spoke quickly, and while his thoughts were far away from what he said. He had not paused to think whether old Bardsley and his grandchild deserved their sentence, or whether it was an unjust one.

His only feeling on hearing Ma'r S'one's news had been one of glad relief. For six weeks he need not be expecting any disclosures to Ambray concerning George. He had seen a two-days' old paper at the Team every day since their arrest, and had searched in it vainly for any news of the blind impostors.

Six weeks! Who could tell whether by the end of such a time that might not be known at the High Mills which would render the worst Bardsley could have to say stingless and trivial?

They had walked on for nearly ten minutes in silence, and Michael had forgotten the question he had asked Ma'r S'one, when he was startled by the old man saying,

"You never arst me 'bout th'og, Ma'r Michael."

"No; but I've been wondering all the way what luck you've had, Mr. Ma'r S'one."

"Arful—arful," groaned Ma'r S'one. "Arful luck!"

Michael uttered an exclamation of sympathy and condolence.

"But what did you get for him then?" he asked.

Ma'r S'one looked up as one aghast, and answered in a choking voice—

"Just what missus said—two pound eighteen and fourpence—Ma'r Michael."

"What? four and twopence a stone! Well done!" cried Michael.

"Ah," said Ma'r S'one with much difficulty and catching of breath, "but you shud a see th' old chaap as baught it, Ma'r Michael,—arl bent, an' gray and saarft in th'eal he wur, and grinny-at-nothing like, and aarf a score older 'an me, Ma'r Michael, he telled me esself."

Michael tried to comfort him by assuring him he had acted but as any one else would have done, but his words had no power to remove the old man's conviction that he deserved imprisonment far more than Polly Bardsley.

Michael parted from Ma'r S'one at Buckholt Farmhouse.

He was carrying his purchase down the yard for him, and had nearly passed the front door before he noticed that Mrs. Grist was standing there.

No sooner did Ma'r S'one also become aware of this fact, than he made a nervous attempt to possess himself of what Michael was carrying for him.

Mrs. Grist, however, had already seen them, and Ma'r S'one was soon shaking at the sound of her voice, and looking helplessly at Michael.

"Well, Ma'r S'one," she called out, "I shud ha' thart you hadn't so much to do to fatigue you but what you could a ca'ied your own little harrants 'rom Tidhurst without having a parcel o' men to bring 'em home for you."

Mrs. Grist invariably spoke of Michael as plural, often to his perplexity, causing him to look round to see who might without his knowledge be accompanying him. He had grown used to it by this time, and gave her a civil "Good evening" as he put down Ma'r S'one's little errands, which consisted of two new pitchforks and a heavy horse-collar.

"I tell you what, Ma'r S'one," cried Mrs. Grist, without deigning to notice Michael's respectful salutation, "when you're out for your own pleasure you go into what company you like—I'm not going to look after you at your age—not I; but when you're on business o' mine, you'll please to keep yourself to yourself, so let that be a understood thing, or you and me will farl out."

"Yes, missis," answered Ma'r S'one in a great tremble, and signing to Michael by exploring jerks of his elbow to go and leave him.

"And I shud like to know how much longer you *are* going to stand there," she continued almost in the same breath, "without a word o' 'pology for bein' so late, an' they caarves left without bite nor sup this nine hour. It's a deal o' use me keepin' a elderly man as wants constant physicking and pampering—o' purpose to be responsible and stiddy, to feed the animals, and he behaving just for arl the world like a giddy lad. Do you hear me, Ma'r S'one, or do you intend to stand there sett'n' me at defiance arl night?"

The "physicking" to which Mrs. Grist alluded had been the administration by her of a black draught on one occasion, about a year ago, when Ma'r S'one, from the effects of overwork, had been unable to rise in the morning; the "pampering" had been the swallowing of a little gruel the next day, when he was too sick to take anything else.

The idea of setting any one at defiance was so terrible to Ma'r S'one that he shook like an aspen as he protested, in a voice full of distress—

"I wur goin' to 'polergize 'bout bein' so laate, missis, but you was tellin' me 'bout th' caarves. I wur laate because I gits along so slow; and 'Arry carled me in th' aarf-way just ter arst me how you was."

Ma'r S'one did tell small untruths sometimes for "peace and quiet." And this was one, as Michael knew by the faint flush that came over his hard little cheek.

"But I 'polergize humbly, missis," he added. "And I——"

"When you've done these parltrey s'cuses, Ma'r S'one," interrupted Mrs. Grist sharply, "I shall be glad if you'll please to recollect I'm waiting arl this time to hear about the business you was sent on."

Ma'r S'one, after much fumbling, drew the purse from his bosom, and with a guilty glance at Michael, gave its contents into Mrs. Grist's fat hand.

Her face expressed so much satisfaction

that Ma'r S'one began to feel a little consoled for all his misgivings of conscience.

"Come, that's arl right," she said, putting the money into her pocket; but the next instant her eye and voice were as sharp as before, when she looked at Ma'r S'one and observed—

"But you know this is just a proof o' what I'm arlways sayin', Ma'r S'one, as you *can* do much more 'an you chooses to do."

Even Ma'r S'one's patient spirit was stung by the injustice of this remark.

"I does arl as lays i' my power, missis——"



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"There, don't argue at me, Ma'r S'one," cried Mrs. Grist; "I wouldn't ha' that if you was as old as 'Thuseler. Come now, I shall be glad if you'll get th' yard cleared o' your friends. You know it's a thing as I never allow no one; a pack o' strangers on the premises arfter dark, speshly from London."

Michael, who had had reasons of his own for waiting, came forward at this, and pretending not to have heard any of the doubtful allusions to himself, inquired if he could take any message to the High Mills for her.

As Mrs. Grist also feigned deafness, and

turned her back upon him, Michael went up the yard with Ma'r S'one, who let him out at the gates with many expressions of humble gratitude for his company. He also apologised to him for having tried to hasten his departure.

"But you see I didn't want fur to aggrawate missis." He explained—"She's arful haard to-night, but it's best not to aggrawate, but to do arl we can fur peace and quiet."

And as Michael turned away he heard the old man murmuring to himself—

"'Cline our 'erts to keep this la!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE spring continued fine. The children came up in troops to the mill-field to look after their floral types, the daisies. The beauty of Michael's new world increased around him with such soft but marvellous speed, that often when he came in the morning to look out at the mill window, he would, after his first glance at the earth, push back his cap, murmuring aloud some word of wonder, and throwing upward, as if straight into God's eyes, a smile of irrepressible lowly, but full-hearted congratulation, as intensely real as that with which some humble workman in a great sculptor's studio might turn to his master after beholding a night's progress of the inspired hand.

Michael loved the summer, and throve in it so well that it was now only the sorrow of those amongst whom he lived that kept alive his own.

As it was now known that George's pictures had not been accepted,—if they had been sent,—and as he still did not come or write, every day which passed seemed to increase the probability that ties stronger than those of home were holding him. For this reason Michael knew that Ambray and Nora regarded these sweet summer days only as lovely thieves stealing wealth from their treasure-house of hope.

Nora little dreamed who knew her best in those days of outward sweetness and inward bitterness,—whose honest eyes watched her from afar when she walked in her aunt's garden, or stood trying to interest herself in seeing the hops tied to the sticks,—whose thoughts followed her at evening up to the old drawing-room,—whose ears listened to the music to which she tuned the sorrows of her heart there in the twilight, when the cows were lowing to Ma'r S'one as he softly shut door after door in the yard, and tottered gratefully to his bed in the stable, a little and yet a little more weary each day than the last.

One evening when Ambray was alone in the mill, and Michael was returning from a journey with Fleetfoot, he suddenly saw passing by the smithy two figures, which he felt certain could belong to none but Bardsley and his grand-daughter.

Long before he came into the village they had disappeared.

Michael stopped at the smithy, and called the old smith out to look at one of Fleetfoot's shoes which he had put on that morn-

ing. The smith saw nothing wrong with it, and disagreed with Michael as to the necessity of doing his work over again.

Michael, however, insisted in a voice and manner almost menacing, and turned away up the White Lane, leaving the waggon standing there, and the smithy loungers staring after him open-mouthed.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Michael reached the top of the White Lane, and the mill-field lay level before him, he saw nothing of the two figures.

They must have gone into the mill.

Michael set off running and burst in at the mill door, breathless and with a tiger-like fire in his great eyes.

First he saw Ambray, who stood with folded arms looking towards the door, as if he had heard his hurried steps and watched for him.

He turned to look in that direction which Ambray fronted, and then he saw Bardsley standing with his hat in his hand and Polly leaning at his side looking giddy and scared with the noise of the mill.

They were considerably thinner, paler, and more ragged than when he had last seen them. In that hurried and excited glance it seemed to him that Bardsley's face showed less cunning and satire, more bitterness and desperation than formerly.

"You are in a hurry, Michael," said Ambray, with a look and tone of peculiar meaning, of which Michael could understand nothing, and at which he could only wonder vaguely.

He attempted no reply, but returned Ambray's look, quite incapable of hiding his great excitement from him.

"Here are some friends of yours, you see," Ambray said, still looking at him with the same searching expression.

"Friends of mine?" echoed Michael with a laugh, scarcely knowing what he was saying.

Bardsley showed the same kind of interest in listening to and considering over Michael's voice as he had done on the occasion of his former visit to the mill. Now, as then, he seemed to feel he was mistaken in thinking he had heard it before.

Michael too watched as he had watched then for the effect his voice would have upon the blind man. And this time he thought, as he had thought before, it was not remembered by him.

Seeing this, he was but the more amazed

at the thought of Ambray's evident suspicion of him in connection with Bardsley.

All possible conjectures passed through his mind startlingly and rapidly. Was Bardsley cheating him? Had he recognised him from the first? Did he know the secret of George Ambray's absence, and inquire after him only to mislead Michael as to the purpose of his visit?

"Well," said Ambray, turning to Bardsley, "and I am to understand, then, that until this man came in your way you were prosperous and comfortable?"

"We was so, sir," replied Bardsley; "the talk and envy of neighbours. Our means was not large, certainly; but neither was our wants, sir. I would have had you see this child in those days, sir."

"Let the girl sit down," said Ambray, himself touching her shoulders, and guiding her to a low bin. "She looks bad enough now," he added.

"So I am told, sir," answered Bardsley; "the truth is, sir, her spirit is broke by these 'ewents as I have told you of. In them days of which I was troubling of you with some account of it, was often remarked to me what a pictur' of 'ealth she were, and what a pictur' it was to see her, gay as e'er sighted on earth, sir, a-sitting at the door platting away at her baskets and a-singin' to the bird over her 'ead—as they say ud look down out of it's cage all in a heap and sulky at bein' outdone in it's own pertickler line of hart, which I have observed, sir, is a thing tryin' to the feelings of most on us, and to many as is of a 'igher moral tone than birds. But I detain you too long, sir, over these recklections of 'appier days."

"Yes, yes, be quick," said Ambray; "you were telling me, before the door opened just now, that some of your neighbours blamed *you* for all this."

"They did, sir," replied Bardsley; "they blamed me for havin' allowed his wisits; but I am a simple old man, sir, of a trustin' nature, and for seemin' honesty and straight-forradness of character I never met one like him. I shud 'a trusted him to the last, sir. Ah, you see, sir," sighed Bardsley, drawing his sleeve across his eyes, and speaking in a voice broken with sobs, "it's so easy to deceive the blind."

"The villain!" cried the simple old miller, trembling with rage and turning his back on Michael.

"Yes, sir," whined Bardsley, proud of this stroke of success, "it is so very easy to deceive the blind and 'elpless."

"Easy to who, to what kind o' man is it easy?" asked Ambray, looking at Michael with eyes full of angry scorn. "Tell me who this scoundrel is, and what I have to do with him, that you come to me with this tale—that's all I want to know."

Bardsley hesitated.

"I—I feel for you, sir," he stammered; "it will be a shock to you, sir. You mustn't be too hard on him, sir."

"Who is he, I ask you, and what have I to do with him?" repeated Ambray with stern impatience.

Bardsley appeared to be seriously disturbed by the task before him. His face grew flushed, his eyeballs rolled, and his fingers worked nervously.

"Indeed, sir," he said, "I feel for you—I do, sir, with all my heart—in making known, sir, that this young man is your—is no other, sir, than your—"

"What now?" cried Ambray, for Michael had seized the beggar by his coat-collar, and was holding him off and looking into his master's face with a gaze that puzzled and amazed him.

"Your—your servant, he means," cried Michael, in a voice so deep and thick Ambray scarcely recognised it.

There was one in the mill who did, however, for no sooner had Michael spoken than Bardsley became too excited even to remember the indignity he had received.

"Ha!" he shouted, throwing his hands upon Michael's shoulders. "*Now* I know the voice!"

"Then mind it," muttered Michael close in his ear. "As you value the life I saved, a word more now and you shall repent it."

He turned towards Ambray, with eyes that had never looked more true—more full of devotion and courage.

"You have found me out, master," he said, scarcely above his breath. "Isn't that enough? Have I any right to ask you to leave me alone to satisfy this man. If I have I would."

Ambray gave him a look in which there was almost as much disappointment as contempt, and went out, closing the door violently after him.

"What lies are these you have come here with?" demanded Michael.

Bardsley was shaking himself, pulling up his collar, and gradually recovering from the effects of Michael's somewhat rough handling.

"You saved my life," he answered, "otherwise I might offer objections to the term."

You saved my life, which is a haction as ought to ha' won you universal gratitude and respect, consequently I will *not* offer objections to your havin' seen fit to come between me and George Ambray's father, as I've come from London on purpose to see. I will only ask you *wiky* you did it?"

When the old miller had gone out, Michael's overwrought excitement had left him suddenly, and the consequences of what he had done oppressed him like a nightmare.

After his first half-frantic question to Bardsley, he had turned dizzy and gone to lean against the steps.

Glancing at Bardsley as this question, with all its suspense and fear, forced itself upon him, he saw what he had not before noticed, that the old man was very far from sober.

His grand-daughter, a picture of weariness and stupor, had fallen asleep where Ambray had seated her.

Bardsley was standing, sulky and perplexed, evidently waiting with no slight misgiving some explanation of Michael's conduct.

"So here is a second time," said Michael suddenly, "that I've saved your precious life for you."

"Eh?" cried Bardsley, lifting up his face in much alarm.

"Well," answered Michael, "I can tell you it would have been about as much as your life was worth to have let that old man know that the rascal you had been telling him of was his son. I wouldn't answer for what might have happened if I hadn't been here to stop you."

"I've always heerd as this old miller is a just and a honourable man," asserted Bardsley, "as wouldn't see the blind and 'elpless imposed on."

"He's one who wouldn't condemn his only son on the evidence of those who he's seen making imposition a business," said Michael quietly.

"Do you mean he wouldn't believe me?" cried Bardsley, clenching his fists. "If it's proofs' and witnesses you want, I could overrun your parish with 'em any day."

"Then why do you come here without any—with nothing but your tongue to tell your tale with?"

"Because I was driv' by misfortchins to come as I could. But trust me, young man, I'll make this place ring with his rane atore I've done with him. Friend as yer are of his, I tell you that."

"How do you know I'm a friend of his?"

"Wasn't you with him that night? Wasn't your cry, 'Hold, George! hold!' my sen-

tence o' life, as I may say? Ha! I knowed your voice from the first, though I couldn't, so to say, lay my finger on where I'd heard it before—not till you pitched me agin the wall just now, and calls to the miller, 'Your servant!' in just the voice as you said, 'Hold, George! hold!' Then I knowed yer."

Michael had become very pale while Bardsley was speaking, and had more than once started as if passionately to silence him.

For a moment or two he remained without saying anything, his eyes fixed steadily on the beggar's face. After this he rose from leaning against the steps, and approaching Bardsley with folded arms, said—

"Now, what was it you were saying to my master before I came in?"

"It's a weakness o' mine," answered Bardsley, "to like to know a person's right to ask such a question as that."

"Haven't I a right to ask it as George Ambray's friend?"

"If you are George Ambray's friend, friend enough to give yer a right to ask such a question, you are friend enough for him to have told you all about my affair with him without my doing it."

"Then I should be all the better able to know if your account of it is true."

"Then I shan't repeat it," cried Bardsley impatiently. "I didn't come here to dispute—I ain't got my case ready to dispute. I came here t' appeal, not to dispute—though I'll do as much as you like o' that when I has things ready."

"Now, Bardsley," said Michael, laying his hand on his shoulder, "let me give you a bit of advice."

"It's a thing as don't generally agree with my digestion," replied the old man, trying sulkily to jerk the hand from his shoulder.

"But you'll find that this will, and I give it to you, Bardsley, as well out of consideration for your affliction, and"—looking round at Polly—"hers, as for *him*. I mean George Ambray. You are right, I *am* his friend, and I would like to do the best I can for him now that he is—not here to receive you and defend himself. My advice is, say no more to Ambray. Tell me the whole truth, prove it to me, and I will do the best that can be done as to making you amends if amends are due to you. What good can Ambray do you? He has barely enough to live upon, any one here will tell you that. I have the means of giving you some help if I see that you ought to have it."

Bardsley considered for some time, rubbing his hand over his face.

"Look here," he said, with decision: "I shan't tell you to-night what I'll do, except as I'll promise you to do nothing one way or another till you come to me at the Bay, that's to say, if you'll come to-morrow some time before evening."

"Why not tell me now? you know my time is not my own," said Michael.

"Well, if you must know why," answered Bardsley, "I should prefer as my head was a little clearer than I find it at present, owing to having had to let Polly rest rather oftener than usual on our way up here."

"At least let me know what you told Ambray," said Michael; "it didn't take you very long to tell it to him."

Bardsley was obstinate. He could not trust his head to tell anything that was to be disputed, he informed Michael.

"Arst for me at the Barge Aground,"

directed Bardsley, "and I will leave 'em acquainted with my whereabouts."

It was about half-an-hour later when Ambray returned home from the mill.

Michael, when he came in, was sitting at the table bending over a letter for home which he had been writing by snatches for the last week. He looked up in patient expectation of the storm that was to burst.

The gaunt old miller had a look of triumph in his face, as well as sadness and contempt—the triumph of a man vain of his judgment who finds a favourite prophecy fulfilled.

Michael returned his look with great gentle eyes, full of resignation and courage.

Instead of closing the door after him, the miller stood holding it open.

"Come," he said to Michael, pointing out
"March! I'll have no scoundrels here."



PART VI.

CHAPTER XXII.



OME," said the miller, seeing that Michael did not move; "take yourself off. If my son was here you would not wait to be told twice. Out with you, you hypocrite!"

Michael sat still, his hands locked on the table before him. He was

too much confused and stunned to be able even to guess as to what kind of disgrace he had taken from George's name to his own. He felt as yet like one fallen from a height—too breathless, too much paralysed to know his own injuries.

The word hypocrite stung him a little; his shoulders heaved rebelliously. He drew a deep breath, and looked at Ambray with heavy and perplexed eyes.

Mrs. Ambray, alarmed on her husband's account by his expression, laid her hands upon Michael in weak command and strong entreaty.

"You've never deceived *me*, Michael Swift," declared the miller in triumphant severity. "I've known you for a different man from what you seemed since the first time you darkened my mill-door. I've suspected something between you and this Bardsley, too, ever since I was told you sent him away without letting me know he had asked for me. Ah, you can't keep these sort of things in the dark *here*, you see; this isn't London."

As Michael drew another hard breath, Mrs. Ambray tremblingly gave his head a push, at the same time commanding that he should not be insolent to his master when he saw him in the heat of passion.

"Who is in a passion?" asked a voice at

the door; and all three turning to look, saw Nora Ambray standing there.

Mrs. Ambray hastened to meet her; Michael went and stood hesitatingly at the foot of the stairs that led from this room straight to his attic. The miller's eyes followed him sternly, avoiding Nora's, which were fixed on her uncle with gentle, smiling accusation, as knowing none other would dare to be in a passion under this roof.

Coughing and trembling, the miller threw himself into the wooden arm-chair by the fireplace.

In doing this his elbow knocked a little slate hanging near the mantelpiece, and made it swing and clatter against the wall.

Ambray turned and looked at it; then resting his elbow on the chair-back, leant his head on his hand and sighed bitterly.

It was on this slate that his debt to Michael had been recorded from the day of his arrival at the High Mills in the second week of March.

He rose and supported himself by leaning against the table near where his niece stood.

"Nora," he said, "I would do almost anything rather than ask you to intercede for me with your Aunt Grist again, but there's no help for it. I must give this man his wages and be rid of him. I can't and won't, while there's life in me, let such a rascal fall into George's very footsteps here—taking his place in this house, at church along with us, and everywhere. No, I will not bear it."

"Why do you stand there, Michael Swift," demanded Mrs. Ambray sharply, "irritating your master by holding your tongue when I dare say you could explain if you liked, and pacify him?"

"Not he!" cried the miller, turning upon Michael defiantly. "Explain! I don't know any explanation a man can offer for cheating and misleading the blind but that he is a worthless wretch that nothing better can be expected from."

Michael at that moment knew none of the inward peace or confidence supposed by some people to be the portion of the falsely-accused. He was, on the contrary, finding himself every instant less and less able to endure with patience or resignation the consequences of his rash impulse. The anxiety with which he waited for the nature of the sin he had claimed as his being made known

to him, was intensely painful. The shame which had already fallen on him was probably twice as hurtful as it would have been to one that deserved to be ashamed, and that was not so utterly unused to such a burden as was Michael, who had led the life of a child and a slave, and had been kept so sinless by his simplicity and his fetters together, that even calumny had forborne touching him.

The most spitefully disposed in his own village would as soon have thought of slandering the babe of a week old, or the white-haired Methuselah of the place, as "honest Michael;" who, of course, being somewhat more sound and purely healthful of mind and heart than most men, was accounted a little "wanting;" and looked after by the village loungers with taps of the forehead and sympathetic winks, especially when he had just parted two furious dogs, or walked out on a Sunday with the plainest girl in Thames Dutton, rather than she should sit alone, and watch her pretty sisters parading their swains before her window.

So Michael's head hung down with as heavy a shame as the greatest sinner's could have done before these three pairs of eyes all looking at him at once, and deciding with deep worldly wisdom that because the cap did not fit him at all, and he carried it with so ill a grace, it must be his.

Suddenly he raised his head and looked at his master as he stood holding the little slate at Nora's elbow, then turning went heavily up the stairs.

They heard him tramping hastily about.

"He is putting up his things, John," observed Mrs. Ambray in alarmed but meek remonstrance.

"What do you say, Nora?" asked the miller, taking no notice of his wife. "You see he takes me at my word, as indeed he had better. Do you think Jane Grist will manage this for me? I believe I would rather cut my hand off than let it touch her money, but I can't keep a scoundrel in my house."

Nora, having received an admonitory twitch of the sleeve from Mrs. Ambray, understood she was not to appear too sanguine on the subject. She therefore averted her eyes with an expression of profound consideration and dubiousness; and when the silence became so long as to be embarrassing, looked up with an affectation of sudden hopefulness, inquiring briskly—

"What's to-day?"

"Thursday," answered the miller, looking at her anxiously; and Nora echoed—

"Thursday?" lifting her brows with a look that seemed to say that of all days in the week Thursday was the most unpropitious one that could have been for obtaining what they wanted.

A firm, light step came down the stairs—unnaturally light and quick, the miller thought, for Michael's; his movements being generally a little ponderous and slow, steady and sure.

His cap hung behind Ambray. He stretched his arm out and got it. Mrs. Ambray silently drew her husband's attention to this. The miller turned and scowled at him.

Michael returned his look with troubled, almost fierce, eyes. A panic was upon him; a wild desire to cast down the idol of this household; and he wished to escape while he yet had strength to control himself.

In turning to Michael, the miller had knocked the slate against him, and it had fallen to the brick-floor.

Michael looked down on it, then put his foot upon it twice, breaking it to pieces.

"Let my wages be forgotten, as my hard service has been," he said, in a voice that made Nora turn and look at him in amazement—it was so full of bitter and despairing solemnity.

"They will not be forgotten. I know where your father lives," answered Ambray. "I shall send your wages there. You deserve them, as you deserve this usage; which you, no doubt, think hard, though I should treat my own son worse if he had acted as you have done."

At this Michael, having his hand upon the latch, turned, his eyes wild with the passion of some desperate reply; and he must have then spoken words which would have cost him a lifelong and bitter regret had it not been for one of the most faint but subtle of influences.

The door of George's room opened out of this. It was open at the moment that Michael lifted the latch of the other door, and as he turned round in his passion a slight breeze blew from it bearing the scent of the flowers with which Mrs. Ambray, after country fashion, daily filled the little fireplace; wondering each morning whether those she placed there might be destined to greet the eyes of him for whom, like disappointed revellers but just arrived in gay robes, and with sweet stores in bosom and satchet to make merry through the summer's day, they were taken in their first freshness of blossoms, colour, honey and dew, to deck this little temple of vain hope.

They were roses there now, whose breath seemed to proclaim them the rich heirs to all the sweetness of the flowers that had lived and died since the year's beginning; but to Michael, as the breeze brought their odour, it seemed like a sigh of bruised and patient love and hope, reminding him how long the vain watch had been kept there, and might still be kept.

He could not bid the watchers watch no more, and tell them that the tardy feet for which they listened would never reach their threshold, that the voice they longed for could never speak to prove to them how much sweeter is a dear sound heard afresh than one remembered ever so tenderly.

These things Michael could not tell them for reasons he thought good; but he remembered that by refraining from uttering the words that had risen to his lips ere the breeze from this still-sad room had touched them like an angel's finger, he might at least save the watchers from much bitterness.

So his tongue was stayed even while his heart was hot within him, and he left his master's house without another word.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MICHAEL had decided on walking to Bulver's Bay and spending the night there, that he might lose no time in the morning in seeking Bardsley, and learning the truth, or as much of it as possible, from him.

The sunlight was still lingering among the pine-stems when Michael passed the knoll, and his heavy heart knew a throb of pleasure as he looked at it and remembered that in spite of all that had happened this day, Lamberhurst was still ignorant of how easily the proud wrestler, the hero of this spot, had allowed the world to throw him.

The Long Ridge fields also received from Michael a more peaceful farewell look than they would have done had he yielded to his temptation to make known how grievously the bright runner, whose feet still seemed to him to press and spurn the summer grass, had swerved and slipped.

The evening was breezeless; its lull was without rest; its shade without dew; it seemed still day with all the sun's heat, but without its colour; the blue of the sky was blanched and faint; the sun burned down in pale, fierce fire, leaving no crimson pall to cover the slow hearse. All the mill-sails on the heights were still.

Michael stopped and looked back.

The white mill being nearest to the edge of the hill, he could see it and it only.

The sails had fallen to rest in a position that made them appear like a huge cross.

The instant Michael looked up and saw it, the feeling came over him that this mill and this valley were not to be departed from and borne only in remembrance by him. That with these things, already so familiar, he was to have yet a nearer, deeper acquaintance.

The great grey-white cross prophesied to him: or rather Michael hung his fears upon it and read them freshly from its face, until, as the heat came down between his eyes and it, he could fancy that it grew and spread, darkening half the valley.

He turned away with a deep certainty that one day he must return to suffer here perhaps the worst that he had ever feared since his great sorrow which led him to this place had befallen him.

A skylark darted from the corn close to him and rose, sending up into the heat-misted skies, and letting fall to the heat-blurred earth, a fountain of song, bright as morning, fresh as rain.

Michael, at this voice of gladness starting up out of the silence and languor like a sudden sweet deed from a stagnant life, looked up and laughed, and muttered while his worn upturned eyes danced in light—

"Well said, little silver-pipe! and I believe you too."

What was said, and what believed in, lay between Michael and the speck growing more and more minute against the blanched blue of the evening sky.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN Michael, early in the morning, called at the Barge Aground, no one there knew where Bardsley was to be met with. On making a second call, an hour later, he heard he had been in for his morning draught, and had left word for Michael to join him on the beach beyond the Fish Market.

Michael, going in that direction, soon saw him in the distance, sitting alone, contemplative, ragged, solitary.

Bardsley knew his step, and listened to its approach, smiling with gratified vanity at the keenness of his ear.

As Michael looked at him, it struck him with some surprise that, as he sat there, his grey beard and rags the playthings of the wind, he appeared less repulsively wicked than pitifully, almost pathetically, insignificant and helpless. Perhaps, Michael thought, it could hardly be otherwise than that any form of evil *should* shrink and appear to diminish and wither here in these grand

front ranks of nature merging into heaven, from which they seem curtained only by excess of light.

Or might it be, Michael wondered, that even the man whom he had thought as unlikely to change his sins as the leopard his spots, had not been able to sit here without receiving inwardly *some* cleansing touches from that spirit of strong, fresh purity that breathes here always, making the sands so fair, and revealing the thousand faint, sweet tints, and tender graining of the pebbles?

"Well, sir," said the blind beggar, as Michael stood still near where he was sitting, "here I am, you see, monarch of all I survey!"

His face, as he uplifted and turned it slowly from side to side while speaking, was not without a certain sadness and grim satire.

Michael looked at him, and was constrained to address him in a manner different from what he intended.

"Bardsley, you are an old man," he said. "You have a child that I suppose you care for—one child? This miller, *he* had——"

He stopped suddenly. Bardsley noticed the stop, and the word at which it was made. He did not, however, choose to let Michael perceive he had done so; but to prevent him from thinking this, altered and finished the sentence for him as if involuntarily.

"Yes, the miller has one child—one son—a very fine young man he is, too. As he's a friend of yours, may I ask where he might be at this present time?"

In his eagerness to come at some idea of how Michael received the question, the blind face was not sufficiently guarded, but showed Michael it was listening intently to the very change of his breathing, to the turn of his foot in the shingle.

Michael stepped back, looked at it hard, and grew pale.

"As I am George Ambray's friend," he said, commanding his voice as well as he could, "you may be sure I am not likely to have much patience to answer your questions about him. I may as well tell you at once that he will not meet you, or have anything to do with you in this affair, except through me. If you ask me why—I say, remember your last meeting."

"Well," said Bardsley after some hesitation, "you was saying about the miller having this one child like as I have Polly. What do you want to make of that? 'Do unto others as I'd be done by,' is that all the tune of it?"

"Whatever I was going to say, I sav this

now," answered Michael, "that the nearer I find you keep to the truth in telling me about this affair, the better it will be for you and your poor child. Come, Bardsley, try it for once in your life, try it for her sake."

"What *you'd* call truth would be nothing but repeating word for word what young Ambray's told you, I suppose."

"No," returned Michael, "I can make allowances for both of you. I can see both sides of the story."

"Which is never alike," observed Bardsley, "to any of us, sighted or blind."

He remained for a moment or two silently digging into the beach with his stick. Suddenly he lifted his face towards the other with so savage an expression on it, that Michael began to hope he might be growing truthful.

"No doubt, young man," he said, in a tone of suppressed hatred, "you thought it a fine thing in your friend that he should be so good as to have such a intention for a day or a hour, though it was for a day or a hour only before he lived long enough to grow wiser. *He* marry Polly? Of course the intention alone ought to a' bin grand enough for us; what right had we to expect to see it carried out—or what right had my gal to faint dead in the church? or such as ud knowed her from her birth to cry out agin him? no right, of course—no more 'an you think I have now to come to his father when I'm starving and she's starving, and gets six weeks of it for bein' obligated to beg."

"Well," said Michael, fearful of letting the old man perceive his breathless interest and surprise, "don't waste your time in that way; tell me the simple facts—your side of the story, as you say; and depend upon it, I shall know if you try to deceive me in anything, and make it the worse for you."

"First of all," said Bardsley, "did he dare to breathe a word agin Polly as first he knowed her?"

"I answer nothing till you've told me all."

"Well," continued Bardsley, "at the time these artists first see Polly a-selling flowers and came a-clamouring to me for to let her be a model, I take my oath as the child had more friends in 'igh circles than I can reklect to count. There was all the ladies connected with the blind school she'd bin in as an eniant, and run away from; not as she didn't feel herself a equil with any there, but quite the contrary through feelin's of independence such as always kept her family from risin' as it might otherwise have done. Well, these ladies, at the time I'm speaking of,

had took fresh interest in her, and got her ever so much basket-work and straw plattin' to do. Others give her different things to do; she was as busy as a bee, and had so many fine friends a-calling on her and bringin' one another to see her, I was forced to give up out-door business and stay at home a purpose to answer their questions, which Polly was not quick at, and didn't used to give satisfaction with. Altogether I was not the only person as declared there hadn't bin so many visitors in our court not since Sally Cole, as you've no doubt seen represented in the travelling wax-works, lay in a trance at number three for seven months, never waking but only once when some gentlemen from the Temperance Society was there, when she expressed a wish to sign the pledge, and fell asleep agen as they put the pen into her hand. But you've read of it in the penny papers, as rose to tuppence on the day she spoke. Polly never rose the papers—her case was considered striking—as being a blind person as could work so hard and be so contented; but simple industry and contentment can never, of course, be as taking to the public as the case of a young woman in a trance, as only wakes once in seven months to observe she is going to heaven, and consequently wishes to sign the pledge."

Bardsley paused and rubbed his head with an old handkerchief he found somewhere in the recesses of his hat, blowing contemptuously with his lips, and in other ways expressing his impatience at the depravity of the public taste.

Michael in listening to him found it not at all easy to follow him in his many changes of mood. He would without any kind of warning pass from a bitterly truthful manner to one of grossly affected simplicity, which would in its turn glide almost imperceptibly into a tone of intense sarcasm and mockery.

"However," he went on, "since the young woman I have named retired into the country, havin'—as her mother gave out when a medical inquiry was talked of—a soul above earthly fame,—since then, sir, there has certainly bin no case to come up to Polly's. And at this height of our prosperity appears this young man—this gentleman, as I took him for, with his fine airs and speeches. Me and Polly's had up every day for models. Taking from models, I suppose you are aware, is the art, they 'as to study of looking at one person while drarin' another out of their own heads. At least I was led so to judge by the talk of the young gentlemen,

when the one as had been last drarin' us was out of the room, and when they always agreed as there was no likeness either in the case of myself or Polly. The modellin' took pretty well for some time, and when it began to fail in regard to myself, I must own to bein' to blame. I don't deny as I got tired of it. Sitting so long in one position, in the constant dread of being howled at, as if the person taking of you was in the last agonies, if you move a muscle, is apt to bring on crick in the neck, and nervous twitchin's all over. Then, too, the bein' called an old rascal, and charged with ruining a rising young genius, because self-respect has compelled one to sew up a few of one's rags, was more than I could stand in the cause of hart or haypence, so I give it up. Polly, unfortunately, did *not* give it up. She was a favourite in other ways than as a model, as she amused them with her chatter and with singing to 'em. They used to meet—shoals of 'em—at one another's lodgings, a purpose to hear her sing. One day young Ambray takes me by storm, coming down upon me with all manner o' names and abuse about Polly, about me lettin' her be where he had drared her hisself. He used to be took with those fits o' sanctification sometimes; and it's what I used to hate in him more than anything. So did his friend, I found that out. He'd come all over good at once, and turn a nuisance to everybody till the fit was gone. Of course I was obliged to act by what he said, and forbid Polly going nigh any o' the set agin. Well, we were ruined by it. Polly's ladies crossed to the other side the way as they passed our court. You see the sort of meetings there had bin at Ambray's and the others' lodgings had made the evening parties scarce of young gentlemen; consequently Polly was past being forgiven—her poor name was picked to pieces, and ne'er a bit o' straw or basket stuff could the child get to plat it together agin. I don't say as your friend didn't have a life of it. Bein' the only one of the young men as took the affair to heart, and tried to help us as well as he could, he was of course fixed on as the worst; which at that time I am bound to say he was not, except in respect of having first led her amongst 'em. I never see anything like it in my life. The parish rose agin' him. I couldn't but pity him myself at that time. They tried to find out his father's address, that he might be wrote to; but, bless you, my lord had kep' it so close, nobody even knew his father was a miller. He never let his own landlady see

the address on his letters. They wanted to get money from him to send Polly to a school; and here the poor fellow hadn't paid his rent for I don't know how long. I would ha' let him alone with all my heart, then I would. He tried for a week or two to ride over it, and went about as proud and bright as ever; but one day he had to give in—they drove him to a fever. We heard from his landlady as he was very comfortable, two old maids la-lies, with parish interests, having took upon themselves to take their knitting every day and sit beside his bed, and talk to him the whole afternoon, in hopes to bring him to a better mind. Altogether, what with peculiar cooking—as cooking often *is* peculiar when rent is backward—and what with the over-excitement of too much female society and an unusual rush of organs on the street, the poor young man was made *so* comfortable that it was said he wasn't likely ever to leave his bed again in this life. Having but just heard this, judge o' my astonishment when one morning my door opens and I hear a quick, unsteady step come in, and something breathing short and fast, then feel the table shake, and hear Polly cry out, and then hear a voice saying to her, 'My child, we are not likely to make each other happy, God knows; but that these fools may see how good I think you, I will give you as honest a name as ever was, and put an end to their blabbing and make your life as peaceful as I can.' I had just presence of mind enough to go up and tell Traps, a friend o' mine in the bird line, who came down and spoke up to Mr. George, not only giving the consent of the family, meanin' me, as was too much shook by surprise to give it myself, but likewise made hisself a comfort to the young man in telling him how everything was to be managed for the wedding to take place as it might be the day after to-morrow. Traps was rather pressing in his offers to go home with him, and never leave him till the day, and he would have done so but that, as he told me, young Ambray give him such a look as he certainly *could* not and *did* not like. No sooner was he out of the house than Traps says to me, 'I hope all may turn out well, Bardsley,' which caused a quarrel, being that sort of observation which, when things *are* to all appearances turning out uncommon well, is lowering to the spirits. It was repeated by Traps more than once through that day and the next. Young Ambray came in for a few minutes on that next day to arrange the time we were to meet and other matters. Traps again was pressing in his offers to

attend him home, and again remarked upon his look as not liking it at all."

Bardsley ceased speaking and sat still a moment, after which he turned with sudden vehemence to Michael, crying,—

"Well! what more do you want? Am I to go into *that* day for you? No. You may fancy it yourself as *he* must 'a done; though he never see it, it must 'a reached him somehow; he couldn't live begone where he might without a-picturing of it to hisself—the church—the crowds in it—the waiting—the riot when the time was past and he had never come—Polly, like a corpse, carried home by Traps—the crowd howling."

Pausing again, the old man's face grew fierce, as if his ears still heard the tumult of that morning confusing him with useless anger and distress. Michael looked at him with pity. Several times he had been near interrupting him by some question that he longed to put, but remembering that it might show the old man his previous ignorance of these events in George's life, had refrained in time.

"Was there," he ventured to ask Bardsley gently some moments after he had ceased speaking, "was there any idea afloat at all among you of what caused him to change at the last?"

"There was some talk," answered Bardsley sullenly, "of a letter from a young lady in the country that his landlady had give him that morning."

"And you never saw him again till—"

"Till you saved my life from him—no, I didn't."

Michael walked slowly to and fro between Bardsley and the sea for a minute or two, then stopped before him. He was thinking why should he not let Bardsley tell the story to George's father after all? Was there anything unforgivable in it to him? As the worst thing in it had apparently been done from devotion to Nora, could the miller hear it without much pity and full forgiveness? Then Michael remembered the question would immediately arise, why had *he* taken upon himself to shelter George? He stood imagining the look, the surprise, the questioning, the suspicion of Ambray, on learning for the first time that Michael Swift, the servant who had come to him as an utter stranger, had known his son. He anticipated all the questions that would be on the miller's lips—why had he concealed from them that he had known him; and then,—*where had he seen George last?*

That thought would have decided Michael, even if it had not been followed by the recollection that the story of the last night on which Bardsley had seen George would necessarily be told by him to the miller so far as Bardsley knew it, and that then the rest would be demanded of himself—how breathlessly he could well imagine.

So Michael told himself that while he still guarded that secret which was between him and the dead, this burden he had taken upon himself yesterday must be borne.

The question now was, how should he satisfy Bardsley sufficiently to keep him from again applying to the miller or endeavouring to discover George?

"Well, Bardsley, you have kept as near the truth as could be expected of *you*," he said, "and I promise you as much shall be done for you as can be, if you leave it to me and trouble George Ambray's father no more."

"I shall see young Ambray himself somehow," declared Bardsley. "He's a-coming into money, and he shall be made to pay for this, first thing."

"You will do nothing of the kind," answered Michael. "You will not see him or get anything from him but what you get through me. You can tell by my having let my master think it was me you meant had ruined you, as you called it, how determined I am in this."

Michael then sat down near him, and again explained to him the uselessness of appealing to Ambray, who had at present no means whatever of helping him. He hinted that George being obliged, for reasons he could not go into now, to keep out of the way, had empowered Michael to act for him in all his affairs as he thought best.

"And if," said Michael, "you pledge your word to come here no more, and to try and lead your grand-daughter into a better way of life, I will take the responsibility, on George Ambray's account, of giving you the means of doing so."

"Hark!" said Bardsley, raising his finger. "Talk o' angels—here she comes."

Michael looked both ways along the beach, but saw no one. Listening, however, he heard Polly's voice behind the cliff, and was not surprised that the artists should have been amused by her singing, which reminded him alternately of rough street-vendors and the sweetest wild birds, London Saturday nights and dewy mornings in the country.

"She's a-singing," explained Bardsley, "so as I shall hear and holler out to let her know where I am. She's a sweet little pipe of her own, ain't she? Hush! keep still, and

let's see if she don't find me out without me moving."

By this time Polly came in sight, with an empty basket on her head. She had ceased singing for a moment, but as she came along towards them she began again, putting her little brown hand to the side of her mouth, that the breeze might not blow her voice from the beach, and prevent its being heard by her grandfather, whom she was seeking. Michael was amused by her little song, as she gave the last line of each verse like a regular street cry:—

"All up and down old London town
In many a court and alley,
All day I cry Come buy, O buy
My lilies of the valley!"

"Here's wilets too, all wet with doo,
Fair ladies, for your toilets;
All up the street they smells so sweet,
O who will buy my wilets?"

"Here take this lot for half a grot,
I've got so drenched and chilly,
And never selle-l, for all I've yelled,
A blessed daffodilly!"

"I'll ketch it so when home I go
With ne'er another fard'n;
I'd rhyther die than have to cry
Sweet flow'r-roots for yer gard'n!"

Polly, by the time her song was finished, had gone past them some yards; and the expression of proud glee with which Bardsley waited in his certainty as to her soon perceiving him was dying from his face when she stood still and half turned in troubled, tender bewilderment.

Bardsley heard her; his smile expanded again, and he laid one finger on his lips and held another up warningly to Michael.

The next instant Polly's basket was sent flying, and she sprang towards the old man with a peal of laughter.

"Ah, hah! you old Turk! You was going to cheat me, was you?" she cried, coming down on the beach beside him with a by no means graceful flop. "Here's a pretty hunt I've had for you. And who's this you're a-talkin' to?"

"This is a friend o' Mr. George Ambray's, Polly," answered Bardsley seriously.

Polly became suddenly decorous, and drooping her face against her grandfather, and fingering his buttons as in old days, inquired in a low shy voice—

"It ain't Mr. Brown, daddy, is it, as drared me, standing on a cheer on one toe, with the tambourine?"

"No, Polly, it ain't," replied her grandfather.

"Is it the gentleman as I was a angel with wings on for?" asked Polly dubiously.

"No, nor him neither, Polly." "Is it him," asked Polly, "as took me wit

the doves on my shoulder? Oh, how they scratched!"

"No, guess again," said Bardsley, laughing. Michael had also laughed a little, at which Polly flushed and sprang lightly up, and, standing before him in a charming attitude of recognition, said, shaking her head, and smiling and sighing at once, with the joy and pain of old memories—

"Ah! I remember now! You took me finding Moses in Mrs. Green's back-parlour!"

"No, no," laughed Michael gently, "still wrong, Polly, all wrong."

Polly sat down by her grandfather, after which she said quietly—

"I know him, daddy; he was in the mill last night."

"Right at last," answered Bardsley.

Michael then talked over with him the several ways by which the old man proposed to employ himself and Polly under the advantages now offered. Michael urged another endeavour to get Polly taken back into the blind school, but at the mention of it she so drooped that he had not the heart to go on talking about what might after all prove unmanageable.



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Bardsley dwelt with regret on the pity it was Polly's blindness prevented her from enjoying the advantages she might have had as the pupil of Traps's in the bird-painting—a prospect which he appeared unable to think of without emotion.

Nothing was settled when Michael left them, after making an appointment for the next day. He would gladly have got them off to London at once, and so avoid the danger of another meeting with Ambray, but this he could not do till he wrote to his father for money.

When he had walked some little distance along the beach in the direction of the town, Polly came running after him, begging saucily for a sixpence.

As Michael gave it to her he laid his hand on her shoulder, and looking at her eyes glittering at the coin, though they could not see it, said—

"You never saw George Ambray, Polly? You never had your sight when you knew him?"

Polly shook her head. Michael saw that a change had come over her when his name

was mentioned. Her laughing lips became set, her eyelids fell like some dead things, and her eyeballs rolled under them in pain.

Michael was sorry for what he had done; but as he *had* spoken and the change *had* come, it was a sad pleasure to him to talk of George again.

"Then you remember nothing about him but his voice, Polly?" he asked softly. "You do not know what he was like?"

Polly's shoulder rose under his hand; her set lips parted and let out a long shuddering breath, on which faintly and tenderly were borne the words—

"I knowed what he was like."

"How, my poor girl, when you never saw him?"

The shoulder rose again, the long breath came again, murmuring softly and with faint triumph—

"But I ketched him all by ear."

"And you cared for him, Polly, so very, very much?"

At this question the tragic little face only grew paler, remaining motionless as marble.

"Are you very angry with him, Polly, then, for using you so ill?"

The pain all passed out of her face, which was raised to Michael with the smile of one who, having been reminded of many sorrows, is suddenly spoken to of a cherished blessing.

"He never used me ill," said Polly, with quiet, deep exultation. "That's only what *they* think. He know'd what was best. I never thought he used me ill not coming. I hope he's know'd all along as I never did."

"And yet, Polly, they say you fainted in the church."

"I was frightened for him," answered Polly. "They made such a row. I thought they'd hurt him—kill him."

She shuddered, and Michael took his hand quickly from her shoulder, and looked upon the stones with eyes full of bitter gloom.

Then he wished her good-bye abruptly, and left her.

Polly stood for some-time in a sort of sorrowful trance, when she suddenly became aware of her sixpence. With a happy little cry, she tossed it up and caught it, and ran towards Bardsley.

"I say!" called Polly, "what'll yer have for dinner? I'm a-going to toss—heads, bacon; tails, herrin's."

"What is it you're a tossing with, Polly?" asked Bardsley, turning round greedily.

On Polly's putting the sixpence in his hand, he smiled.

"A couple o' penny loaves and one save-loy, Polly, must be the bill o' fare to-day," he said, putting it in his pocket; "for the other threepence I intend to use in purchasin' paper, envelope, and stamp. Ink we can borrow."

"Whatever for, daddy?" asked Polly, hungry and disappointed.

"To get our scholarly young friend at the Barge to write to Traps to-night for us, Polly," he answered, buttoning up his coat with unusual energy, "ewents havin' occurred as I require the light of Traps's calm judgment on."

CHAPTER XXV.

It had been one of the mournfullest days to the old couple at the High Mills.

Nora had blamed Ambray for destroying, in his violence and folly, the arrangement to which she had had such difficulty in bringing Mrs. Grist to consent.

When the miller asked her if she would have him keep such a character as Bardsley had described Michael's, and as Michael had accepted as his, Nora declared that the man should at least have had time and opportunity allowed him to speak in his own defence—that his truthfulness was in his favour. He would not, she reasoned, have accepted, as he had done, the charges made against him if they were really as heavy as Ambray thought them; and if he had not hoped to clear himself sufficiently for his master still to retain him. She spoke of the honest indignation she had seen in his face and manner from the moment she had come into the cottage; and altogether caused Ambray to regard his own conduct in so bad a light, that he, being one of those persons who no sooner see an unfavourable reflection of themselves than they are seized by a desire to smash the looking-glass, soon ordered her to go with very little more ceremony than he had shown Michael.

Mrs. Ambray, who had taken no part in the quarrel, but in alternately pulling Ambray's tall figure back into his chair from which he kept rising angrily, and in patting and stroking Nora's hands, was thankful when her niece had gone and she had but one temper to manage.

To soothe this one she tried a thousand arts, even descending to a little abuse of Michael; at which Ambray told her to hold her tongue, declaring that however bad the man might be, he had behaved well enough to her. Three or four hours she was on her feet attending to his comforts, his cough mix-

ture, which he had made over again half-a-dozen times, his chest plaister, his rheumatic ankle and shoulder, and the innumerable requirements of a selfish man sick in heart and body; for all of which attention, when she at last sat down, aching in every limb, she was rewarded by seeing him drop his grey head in his hands, and hearing him moan into them—

"My God! what have I done to be left alone in the world like this?"

His wife, stung for his sake as well as her own, looked upon him with inexpressible pity and tenderness.

"It's hard for you that you should feel that, John," she said; "God knows what I should do if I did."

Ambray was not so intellectually swinish as to be quite ignorant of the worth of the pearls of affection that were cast so lavishly before him by the most leal old heart that ever beat; but in perceiving them and their value he was only troubled at times by a vague sense of waste, as one might be in using some precious material for a purpose for which the commonest would do as well. He needed in Esther but a nurse and servant—a supplier of common physical wants; his heart was closed obstinately to all affection, hope, or comfort from any source but one; and as from that nothing came, his spirit starved and soured, so that he, in his turn, had nothing to give. A beggar in vain himself, others must needs beg vainly of him. Thus he excused himself to himself for his hardness, and when he saw his wife suffer at it, blamed the cause of his own suffering—George.

Since a morning in George's second summer when Ambray had watched him from the mill, using both his baby hands and setting his dimpled feet against a ridge to give him strength to tug a scarlet poppy from the corn, his affection for the child and the ambition the act suggested that he should reap a long life's harvest from his grandfather's land, had become a passion. At first this had met with but little hope to nourish it, but in time his brother's early death and the prospect of George's marriage with Nora had so strengthened it, that it overcame every other feeling; life itself was but a slave to it.

Thus when Ambray on the day following Michael's departure sat reflecting how this hope, this idol, had been injured by his soreness of temper,—which had first driven away the man whose presence had enabled them to subsist through this weary waiting, and next had hurt and offended George's be-

trothed herself, it was no wonder that his heart should be sick and full of despair.

His harsh treatment of Michael had been wrung from him by simple and bitter jealousy at God's having given one man such a son, while he who had staked his all upon his child—who had not retained or wished to retain one hope apart from him—was thus deserted, neglected, defied. Often he had felt inclined to lift his hand and strike Michael when he saw his dark eyes gleaming tenderly over one of old Swift's short, cold, ill-spelt letters.

For this reason he was but sulkily and dully pleased when at noon a fish-boy brought him a letter from Michael, asking forgiveness for his rough departure and permission to return, and telling him how he was arranging to assist those who had been injured, though not, Michael assured him, so greatly as Bardsley would have had him to believe.

Mrs. Ambray dared not remain in the room for fear her husband should see the relief and thankfulness in her face when, after having asked him what he should do about the letter, he had replied—

"Nothing—and if he comes—he comes."

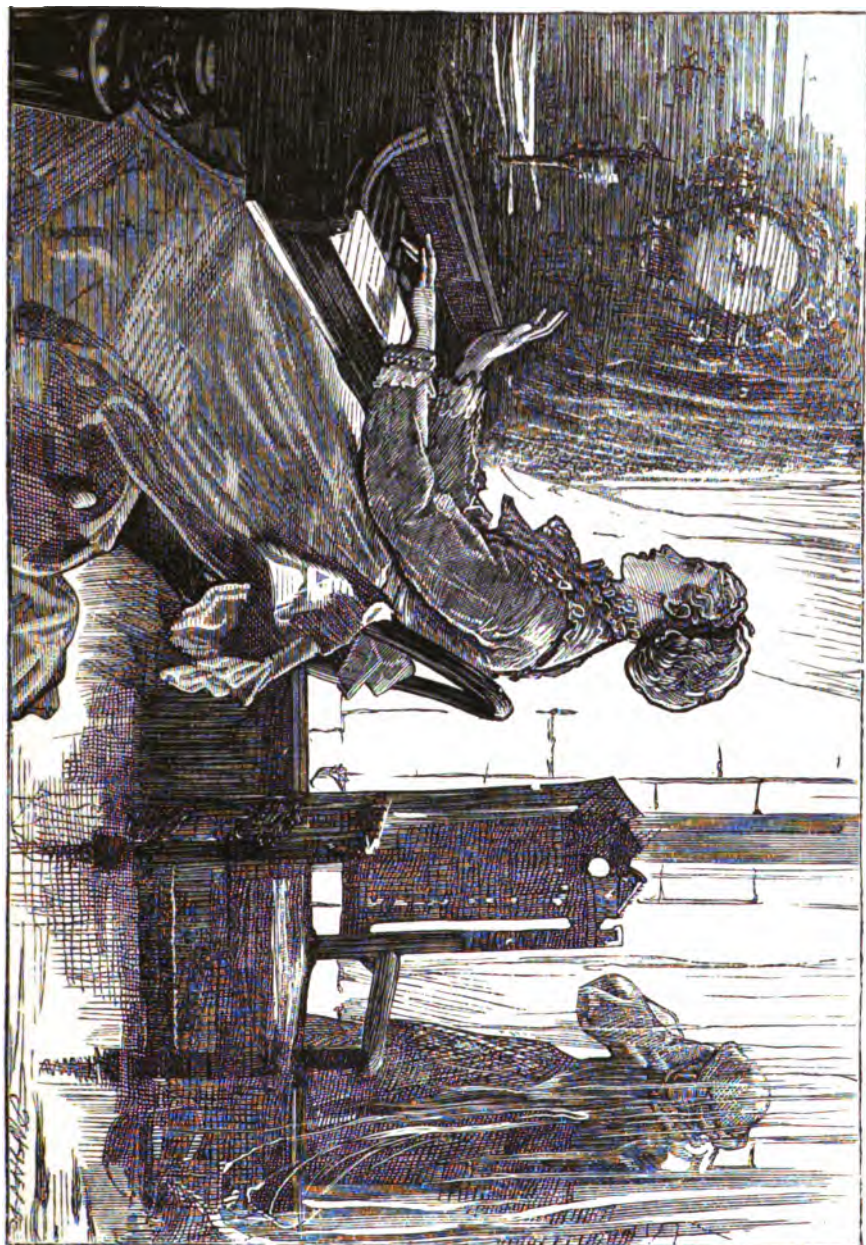
So when, after dark, the door opened, and Michael looked hesitatingly in, his great shoulders drawn up, his head bowed, his pardon-begging eyes dazed by the candlelight—a picture of profound and humble contrition, he was not forbidden to enter and seat himself in his old corner.

The next morning, when Mrs. Ambray saw the sails sweeping lazily round in a languid sweet sea-breeze, and Michael white from head to foot, standing on the little terrace and looking across the Buckholt fields, she was obliged to hide behind the bee-hives, that she might have a thankful cry without being scolded for it.

Ambray did not speak to Michael for several days. Life evidently was not to go on at the High Mills even as smoothly as it had done in the earlier part of the summer.

Michael's father wrote one day to tell him his money was all gone, and on another to tell him that an old blind man had been worrying them with mysterious demands in Michael's name. At this critical time Michael dared not cease sending the small sum Bardsley had received from him since his and Polly's return to London. To obtain this money now he was obliged to beg Ambray to allow him to work some hours daily for Mrs. Grist, explaining to him his necessity for doing so. Ambray did not refuse his consent, but was rather glad to

"LISTENING CLOSE TO THE WINDOW, HIS HAND BEHIND HIS EAR."



have this thing to taunt Michael with, so that his life—what with overwork, unkindness constant and galling, and the weight of three other persons' troubles—was no easy burden to him. He generally bore these taunts about Polly in silence and gentleness, but once or twice he had been unable to keep himself from turning upon Ambray with an indignant and passionate burst of laughter, which, though abruptly and sternly stopped, none the less had filled the old man with subdued fury.

Dissension seemed to ripen in the valley with the corn that harvest. Ma'r S'one brought rumours of wars from the farm, where it seemed Mrs. Grist was encouraging an unwelcome wooer of Nora's, to her niece's distress and Ambray's rage. There seemed no fear so strong in him as that of Nora breaking her engagement with George. If he heard of any of her friends from the Bay going to see her, he would never rest until he had learnt all he could about them; and Nora seldom had a letter but he would hear of it, and demand of her the writer's name, and sometimes the contents of the letter also.

Michael knew that Nora tried hard to keep patience and peace in her heart through all this, but he often saw her leave the miller's cottage with flushed cheeks and weary eyes, and walk home with a slow and springless step.

He noticed, too, that she began to catch some of the feverish, fresh expectancy that had possessed Ambray of late, and that seemed increasing upon him so that almost every sound made him start and tremble.

One night Michael heard him say to his wife in suppressed excitement—

"Esther, that boy's coming—I feel it—I feel he might come in at any moment."

The next day he told Nora the same thing, and her eyes filled as she looked at him solemnly and answered—

"How strange! I have felt so too."

The only times of rest Michael knew in those days, so full of restlessness and fever, were the evenings when he stole down the white village road, over which the shadows of the thatched cottages lay so softly and still, and leant upon the gate at Buckholt Farm. For it was at these times Nora's voice came out to complete the sweetness of the summer night, of the lake-like fields of heavy harvest dew, the star-jewelled mill-sails—still and moving—and the unseen sea, giving the valley breath with which to tell its odours.

Generally Michael would see Ma'r S'one listening close to the window, his hand behind his ear, his wondering little eyes fixed on his

young mistress as she sang, with all her soul in her face—like a modern St. Cecilia trying to draw down the angel of peace.

Michael loved best to steal away before she rose, because sometimes her sigh, or her look into the night, haunted him too long with its sweet patience and wonder, its foreboding or hope. Neither did he care to hear the invariable and solemn exclamation of Ma'r S'one, as his smock disappeared round the house:—

"The Lord forgive Ma's Garge!"

The harvest came.

One morning as they sat at breakfast the first band of reapers went by the window.

Ambray started up, and, going to the door, looked after them with eyes half frenzied.

"My God!" he cried, "is that it? Must I see *this* year's sheaves hugging each other over all my father's land without knowing if I shall ever hold my boy again? Oh, if he is not coming, let the harvest rot!"

He stretched his long arms out through the open door, and lifted up his face with a mingling of malediction and prayer fearful to see.

Michael rose, got past him, and went into the mill.

The whole morning he sat at one of the little windows without moving, watching the cottage-door and Ambray, who frequently came out of it, and walked a few yards in the sun, looking now with a quieter gloom at the reapers at their work.

At last, suddenly, and quite before he was aware of his approach, Ambray felt Michael's hand touching his arm.

"Master," he said, breathing as if he had just run from some great distance, instead of Ambray's having seen him sitting quietly in the mill but a minute since. "May I speak to you?"

"Why, what is the matter with you?" asked Ambray with puzzled sternness, stepping back as he looked at him, and noticed that Michael was paler than he ever saw living man look, and that his eyes were at once more resolute and more full of agony than any eyes his own had yet encountered.

There was but one object concerning which Ambray could feel hope or fear—one source to which he could imagine such anguish as he saw here must belong.

"George!" he almost shouted, laying his hands on Michael's shoulders, and looking upon him as if he would devour his news out of his soul before his lips could speak it. "Is it about George?"

"Let me come and tell you," answered Michael. "Let me tell you in the mill."

Half leaning on him, half supporting him to make him move faster, Ambray went with him into the mill.

They stood by the long deal shaft exactly as they stood there when Michael first came, and where he had looked up and nodded as the miller said, "I have a son in London," and had felt that movement to be the greatest crime of which he had in all his life been guilty.

Ambray laid his hand upon the shaft now as he had done that day.

Michael also took hold of it to keep himself from falling.

As their eyes met again Michael saw that Ambray had had time to reason with himself—to think that the news which looked so terrible in Michael's eyes need not necessarily be about his son.

Then, without an instant's pause, the words came with a dull monotony—like a bitter lesson learnt by heart and soul—

"I saved an old man's life from a young man who would have killed him—if I—had not used violence to the young man, who was strong—very strong. I used violence—I killed him—no one knows I did it—no one but you—his—his——"

Michael's voice failed him; he saw that the miller drew himself back, erect and strong—that the hope which had risen in his eyes was determined to die hard.

Michael clung to the shaft like the last wretch left upon a wreck to the swaying mast, and cried—

"Have mercy upon me, master!"

"Unlucky wretch!" murmured Ambray, bewildered, "what have I to do with mercy? You have really done this thing you say you have? You have killed a man? *You!*"

At this moment, the bell attached to the mill-door rang; a flood of light fell on their faces; a girl had come for a small measure of barley-meal.

Michael looked at her, and heard her demand, with a dull, vague wonder; a horror such as, if the dead could feel, they might know at seeing some one waiting a customary service from their hands.

He did not move except to take one hand from the shaft, and stand erect beside it.

Ambray with a strong step went and took a measure and filled it, and poured the barley into the girl's apron; Michael staring at him with suspended breath; appalled by the sight of his calmness, which showed how little of his task was yet done.

He saw that hope, like some hurt, wild creature was stung to fresh strength in him by the shock it had received, and was prepared to defend its fierce, faint life to the last.

When the girl had gone and Ambray had closed the door upon her, he turned to Michael with this look of assurance and defiance in his eyes, and Michael cried out in a voice scarcely louder than a breath, but audible and pain-burdened as the breath about to pass away for ever—

"You must understand me! I must make you understand me! This young man——"

His voice died, and they looked at each other in utter silence.

It seemed that minutes passed in this way before Michael again clung to the shaft as he had done before, and cried—

"Have mercy upon me—it was your son!"

Suddenly, before he well knew how Ambray had approached or taken hold of him, Michael was half running with feet like lead—half being dragged along—past the field of fallen corn towards the cottage.

The next moment he was standing before Mrs. Ambray and Nora, and a voice such as he had never heard, but by which all fears of the past seemed uttered afresh, was shouting over him—

"What have you told me? Repeat it here—before this woman that bore him, and this girl—repeat it!"



PART VII.

CHAPTER XXVL



NORA had been sitting at Mrs. Ambray's feet reading to her, until heat, weariness, and the music of a rich, soft voice had sent the old woman into a gentle sleep. She had dreamt of George, and her dreams, coming out of sounds

so pleasant, were themselves joyful, making her have a sense of the desired presence living and moving in the house, filling its master with gladness, and herself with peace. Nora, when she saw the old arms tremble, and the sweet old mouth move as with a sense of smiles, and with whispers of the well-loved name, knew how it was with her. She allowed herself to fall under the same spell, to imagine—not the moment of George Ambray's coming, when the hope and fear so long at war within her must, at her first look in his face, close in a last conflict, and receive, one of them, its death-blow; not this moment, too full of acute joy or pain to be imagined in any quiet mood such as the afternoon encouraged, but the peace that would come afterwards. It was of this she dreamed; the deep, sweet lull when the excitement of the prodigal's return, with its feasting and tears and passion, its rejoicing and shame should be past, the wonder over, beholders wearied and gone, the house left with no voucher for its joy but the dear pardoned one himself, scarcely daring to show the love and gratitude in his chastened eyes, or to let it speak in his broken and seldom-lifted voice. Of this and the vying of forgiven and forgivers in humility of bearing towards each other, of the few words spoken, the long, full silences, the restraint of each heart over itself in its tender

dread of again disturbing by a too loving look or tone the newly-stilled waters in dear eyes, the recognition of this care in one another—making the eyes to swim in spite of it—of these things Nora dreamed, not sleeping, but looking up from her book to the portrait of George, her head on Mrs. Ambray's knee when the footsteps startled her.

She knew Ambray's step instantly, but whose the other with him and why they came in so much haste she asked herself in a suspense that would not for many moments have been supportable. Had George come home? What so likely as that he should go to his father at the mill, and that Ambray, unable to express the readiness and fulness of his pardon, had hurried him here to receive theirs first.

It was scarcely two minutes from the time she heard the steps to the appearance of Michael and the miller at the door, yet in that interval the idea of George's return became as a reality to Nora—her suspense, her terror was now all as to what his face would tell her, when it should appear, of his faith or faithlessness towards her.

She had risen and was standing with her hand on Mrs. Ambray's chair—pale, cold—her eyes looking upward, praying she thought, but really doing no more than seeking to bargain with God for her desire, offering—as so many at such moments offer—joy after joy, hope after hope, out of life's unknown store, for the possession of the one thing then and there so coveted.

Then the door was pushed open and the two men burst upon her sight and her ears like a storm, Ambray shouting—

"Repeat it here before this woman that bore him, and this girl—repeat it!"

Almost in the same instant Nora, looking into the eyes of Michael, remembered the fears with which they had filled her on the morning he had come to her at Stone Crouch. The panic his words had then stilled returned upon her now, and as if no time had passed since then, when the lace-work frame had fallen from her hands as she stood demanding the truth of him, as if no summer had intervened to hide the rough rooks' nests in the poplars with its living architecture, or to heap treasure on the windswept meadows sloping to the sea. Nora took up her long silenced cry—

"O, what is it? Tell me. You came to

tell me at Stone Crouch. You have known ever since. I think you have known he is dead. Is that it? Is he dead!"

In looking at her and summoning strength to answer her, Michael for the moment forgot all else—even his master. The pity for her which had become a part of his very nature since he had first seen her in the mill, so overcame him, that he was forced to fall forward and lean with his arms on the table as he answered her in words that seemed dragged up one by one by a super-human effort.

"It—is—so. The young man is dead!"

Mrs. Ambray, but half awake, was sitting upright in her chair when the words reached her ears.

The face of Nora, the attitude of Michael, left her in no doubt as to the meaning of what she had heard; and she rose to meet not her own misery, which she put aside as a thing that could, and too surely *would* wait, but her husband's, that she knew would take him up in its power as the wind takes a withered leaf.

It so happened that for once Ambray thought of her before himself, not through any unwonted return of affection, but simply because *her* loss, *her* sorrow, did not seem so vast and difficult a thing to realise as his own.

He met her as she came to him, and kissed her with lips cold as ice, murmuring, while keeping his arm round her—

"Poor mother—poor soul! Dead! Her son dead!"

Then, as if the contemplation of her loss lifted his senses to some idea of his own, his arm slipped from her, his eyes looked upward, and he threw his hands up, palms outwards, like one who would push off a descending weight, saying—

"Dead! My son dead!"

"The young man is dead!" repeated Michael, gathering himself up from where he had fallen with his arms on the table, and turning from Nora to Ambray.

At the sound of his voice the miller let fall his arms and looked at him. Michael met his look with eyes in which fear, pity, and pain were almost overcome by a certain patience and resignation, which showed this moment had been looked for and dwelt upon long enough to have rendered its awfulness familiar to him before it came to pass. In spite, however, of this, his suffering was beyond anything he had ever imagined it could be when Ambray turned from looking helplessly into the face of an indomitable and

remorseless fate to the instrument that had been used by it to deal him this blow, and the fearful relief, light, and fury that filled his eyes as he remembered that here he was not ~~so~~ helpless, made Michael extend his hands in a mute appeal for mercy. Such a look—as that with which a general losing a battle through the treachery of one man might turn his eyes from the spectacle of loss and blood he cannot stay to the traitor in his power—Ambray turned on Michael.

Even Nora, standing, white, transfixed, stunned by the change that had come over life and all the world at Michael's words, was penetrated by fresh fear as she saw this look.

Mrs. Ambray clung to her husband's arm with a sense of the worst having yet to come.

"Mercy!" cried Michael faintly, with extended hands.

"How did my son die?" asked Ambray, shaking off his wife and folding his arms.

"I will tell you—you shall hear all—all," answered Michael, repeating his gesture of entreaty and protestation.

"I will," said Ambray, looking at him with a fearful calmness. "I will hear all. Look you, I will have out of you every word my boy said. I will have you make me see how he died as if it happened here before me."

At this Michael's eyes filled, and he smiled almost with triumph as he cried—

"There was never gold left by dying man, or deed of millions value, so treasured as the least of his last words has been by me, for the sake of those he went from so untimely and unaware. Sooner would I have forgot to see, or hear, or speak than this. I have said it all as I mean to tell it you now. I have said it on my bed at night, and in the mill, till I have it by heart."

Ambray, with the terrible forethought of a torturer, perceiving that his victim's strength would not endure to the desired end, pointed to a bench in the middle of the room, and said—

"Sit!"

Michael, after stretching up his arm against the wall, frowning and dizzy, as if he were feeling for the regulator in some mill where the sails were flying ready to be wrenched away, and the air was dusty with the raining meal, dragged himself to the bench and sat down.

The others stood near him, and he spoke—sometimes his hands locked in each other, and his head and shoulders stooping low,—his eyes fixed on the floor, sometimes looking up from one to another of his listeners' faces.

Ambray stood close before him, his eye glittering with jealous anger whenever Michael looked, or appeared to be directing what he said towards either of the others. Michael never paused to think, the tale was already made; the very manner in which he began it—speaking of things that they knew—showed that it had been put together long ago, and learnt, as he had said, “by heart,” with too much pain to admit of even those alterations which time and certain circumstances seemed to render necessary.

“My father,” said Michael, stooping low and looking as if he read what he was saying on the floor between his feet and Ambray’s, “has a small corn-shop on the green at Thames Dutton. There are rooms over it which in summer-time we let to such as come to fish or to row on the river.”

At this Michael’s eyes looked slowly up from amidst them all and rested on some pieces of an old fishing-rod tied carefully together and hung against the wall. Ambray looked in the same direction, and then his eyes and Michael’s met, and Michael’s fell again.

“On the tenth of last August in the evening I had come home from the mills where I worked, and was standing in the little garden at the side of the shop nailing an apricot to the wall while my little sister held the nails and bits of list for me. My mother was inside calling to us to train a branch nearer to the parlour window. My father sat at the shop door reading his newspaper. He had been reading something aloud to us which had made us laugh. I was laughing very much.—[I have never laughed so since.]”

When Michael said anything which was not in the heart-learned story, the difference was made plainly apparent by some change of voice or look. Several times it happened that some little fact which helped to colour the incident he might be telling was remembered by him now and mentioned; but when this was so, it stood out like fresh paint on a dry picture, or a written comment on the margin of a printed page. These manifest additions came generally in short, complete sentences, interrupting the flow of the carefully-considered, formally-worded recital or confession, and almost in every instance throwing a sort of lurid reality upon the moment or thing which it concerned.

“While I was laughing and looking down at my sister, and trying not to let go the nail I was stretching up to hammer in, I saw her turn serious all in a minute and hang down her head as if she was ashamed

of having laughed so loud. This made me look round towards the road, and then I saw a young man—a young man standing still—looking at us. I noticed that he was ill [the weight of the small bag that he carried seemed too much for him, and his eyes frowned with pain as they looked at us]. I did not wonder then why my sister had stopped laughing, for he looked as if it was a kind of affront to him to see us so. In another instant we heard him, when we had turned away, speaking to my father about the rooms. He wished to take them for some weeks. He went in and looked at them, and said that he would take them. He told my father that his name was George Grant, that he was an artist; but my father is nervous about money, he refused to receive this young man unless he paid him some at once. When my father told him this he said it would not be convenient, and went away. As he went along the road I could see that he hardly knew how to drag one foot after the other, and had often to put his hand on the railings of the green to keep himself from falling. He went right on to the bridge and disappeared from our sight. Before long he came back, looking very wild and weary, and it all at once came to my mind that he had nothing to pay the bridge toll with. He lay down at the far end of the green. [Somehow I could not take my eyes off him till they fetched me out to cricket]. I went out to cricket about seven o’clock and this young man lay all the time watching us. [Mostly I thought he looked as if he would be glad for the ground to open and give him a grave as he lay; but sometimes he would lift up his head and watch us mostly like an old man who has given everything up, and only remembers what he used to do; but sometimes he would look very different, half scornful like one far a-head of us, and shout out that such a one bowled too high or too low, or cry “bravo!” or growl out heartily at a blunderer.] I don’t know how I came to make up my mind to speak to him, but we did somehow at dusk, when we were alone on the green met to talk over what had been said by my father about the rooms, and were as good friends as if we had known each other for months. He came home with me—he had the rooms—allowing me to settle the difference with my father. He stayed with us till——”

It was here that Michael evidently came to some expression in his story which he found it was unwise or impossible to utter, and, failing to find one more fit for his purpose,

sat suffering frightfully in the knowledge of how much worse his silence was than the words he had held back would have been.

As he paused, looking down upon the floor, he saw Ambray's feet silently move a little nearer to him.

Michael lifted his hands and eyes in a mute entreaty for patience, and again stooping low, let the blank left by the discarded words pass unfilled, and went on.

"He was the first friend I ever had in my life, and he called *me* friend—God knows why—he had everything to give—I nothing but gratitude—the willing service of my clumsy hands—my few spare hours, my little money—such a liking as almost passed my affection for my father and mother and all belonging me; this I gave him, and the wonder, the honest though worthless praise of all my mind. And for this he gave me his confidence, as much of his time and company as my small leisure could hold; called me friend; made my life a different thing for me from what it had ever been before. I dropped most others of my acquaintance, out of fear he would not care to see his friend with any so humble as they were. To make his painting-room ready for him was my first task in the morning; at night, so long as he would talk I listened, more lost in him than in the best book I ever read. I heard his real name. I heard of all here. His father, that he trusted to make proud of him yet; his mother, that he thought to comfort yet; the lady that he hoped to make himself worthy of, and then give up his claim, to win it back, he said, in some humbler and worthier manner. I heard of all. On the third of December he read out to me how some actor, a young friend of his, was to appear in a new play at the theatre, and seemed so grieved he could not go to see him, that he hardly touched his breakfast. I asked at the mills for a holiday, went to London, bought two tickets for the pit, and took them to him, making believe they had been given me at the mills, and we went together and saw his friend. He had a great success, and George was wild to speak to him. He was afraid to go to him behind the scenes because he was sure to meet many people he most wished to shun; for the same reason that he had taken another name for a time. He sent me round with a message to his friend. I was not able to give it—they said the young man was gone. When I came back to the top of the street, where I had left George, I found a crowd there. Before I saw him I heard his

voice crying out in a great passion. I could not hear what he said. I pushed my way to where he was, for I was afraid for him—he had drank too much, we both had. I saw him struggling with an old blind man. I saw then that the crowd had nothing to do with them, but were round an oyster stall. George was trying to get away from the old man, who held him with fingers like iron, and the old man was calling out to some one at the stall to help him; but all there were taken up with a dispute, the owner of the stall having charged some one with stealing a knife. At the first instant I saw him, George was using only one hand, and holding the other back as far as he could. Directly I came up the blind man shouted louder—then George's other hand swung round towards him, and I saw a knife in it. I rushed to him cailing, 'Hold, George!' But the blind man's last shout had made the crowd hear. We heard a rush of feet towards us. George made a desperate struggle to free himself. The blind man held on to his coat with his teeth as well as his hands. Before I could part them by fair means, George, mad at hearing the crowd coming, would have used his hand with the knife in it if I had not caught it. I caught it, and held it by the wrist. Then with his left hand he clutched the old man's throat. I saw his blind eyes roll and turn upward—his lips grow black; but he held George still: if he had died he would have died holding him. The crowd came running close. George shook him. My eyes were on the blind old face. I thought to see death on it in an instant. I struck at George's hands with the handle of the knife, which I had got from him, then with the blade. Then suddenly the struggle was between ourselves alone."

Michael paused.

"The struggle was between yourselves alone," said Ambray, in a clear voice; "you, Michael Swift, and my son, George Ambray."

Michael looked up at him, then rose, looked on the floor, and up again at the miller.

"I cannot," he said helplessly, "tell what happened in the struggle."

"But you shall," said Ambray, coming a step nearer to him, and speaking in a voice of unnatural quietness and strength.

"I cannot," repeated Michael.

"You shall!"

"I cannot. The next thing I remember, George was lying on the ground, the knife was in him. I tried to draw it out, I could not; my fingers were helpless as the dead, and it

was fast in. The roughs were now upon us, calling to one another that it was young Ambray, as if they had been looking for him some time to do him harm. When I made them see how it was with him, one asked who had done it, and I looked round and said 'He is gone,' and at this they took it to be one of themselves who had done it, and made off. I called to one of the stall-men to fetch me a cab. While it was coming, George turned on my arm as I knelt holding him, and cried out, 'Michael! you butcher! you fiend! you have done for me! Take out the knife!'"

While saying this Michael had stood with his hands crossed at the wrists, and hanging before him as if they had chains on them, and spoke in a voice of one rather making confession before a judge, than to those who had been injured by his act.

Ambray had moved further away from him, and stood with his arms folded, his eyes fixed upon him.

Mrs. Ambray had for the time forgotten her husband, and it was George's mother only that Michael felt gazing upon him from her eyes.

Nora, who had for some time been standing at the table just as she stood to receive Michael's answer to her question, had at the last words slipped upon her knees, and, resting her elbows on the table, held her clenched hands under her chin to keep herself from shrieking.

As Michael, having paused for want of voice, turned his eyes about him, and observed the attitude and expression of each, memory and self-possession threatened to fail him; but Ambray seeing this danger in his wild eyes and panting chest, cried in a clear, inexorable voice—

"Go on. My son said, 'Take out the knife.'"

"Yes," returned Michael faintly, almost gratefully; "and I took it out, and his blood rushed on me. When the cab came I lifted him in, telling the man he had been stabbed by the roughs we had quarrelled with. He heard what I said; and when we were alone, and I sat huddled in the bottom of the cab to support him, he moaned out, 'You murderer, I shall not live to contradict you!' The cabman of his own accord stopped at a surgeon's near; but, scarcely in my right mind with fright, I told him the young man wished to be taken home at once. George again had heard me, and burst into tears as his face lay on my shoulder, and said, 'Now I must really die, Michael, if I am to get no help till then.' I said, 'No, no!' and kept

breathing on his hands and forehead to warm them, but they got cold as stone. All the latter part of the journey I thought he was dying, or dead, he was so still; but as we passed the light at the bridge toll-gate, I saw his eyes looking at me. When we stopped at our house my father came with a light and cried out at the sight of me lifting George from the cab. I said to him, 'Help me, father, Grant has been stabbed by some blackguards we quarrelled with outside the theatre.' I carried him up to his room. The knife had gone into his side here, below the heart. My father sent one of my brothers for a doctor. When he came, my father and mother assisted him—for I stood just inside the door unable to move. All this time George did not speak, but only moaned whenever they touched him. At last the doctor stood by the bed, with his hat in his hand, and said, 'Good night, my lad; I have done all that I can for you.' George said, 'Good night, sir,' and held out his hand. And I thought 'Now will be my ruin.' But he did not speak of me, but asked—with a—with a smile—'Doctor, will it be one hour, or not so long?' And then the doctor said, 'My lad, it may be three or four.' 'Three or four,' George said, then asked my father, 'Where is Michael?' I went to him, and he asked the others to leave us. When they had gone he said, 'Michael, come, don't be afraid. I can hold my tongue for three hours, and after that who is to know?' I fell down by the bed, and cried out, 'Don't, George, don't—if this is to be—if you *are* to die, I shall give myself up. They shall hang me.' He touched me with his hand, weak and light as a feather, and said, 'Do not trouble me now, Michael. I cannot have my father—or my mother—or—*her*—at my death-bed; let me have my friend, and don't let him be troubled.' For half an hour we were very still, holding hands. In about this time George gave a sigh, and said, 'I ought to rouse myself; there are some things I must tell you. I have been thinking I was telling you, and all the time never opening my mouth. I am feeling very strange; I scarcely think it *will* be three hours, Michael.' Then he told me the things he wished to tell me. Some day they may be told by me again, but not now."

"You will keep back nothing my son said that night," commanded Ambray, who was now listening with his back turned upon Michael.

Michael remained silent a moment. At last he said—

"When I told you that every word of his should be repeated, I had forgotten that these things I speak of could not be told, as I promised him that I would keep them from you. Will you wish me to break my word to him?"

As Ambray did not answer, Michael went on, as if he had his consent to leave the matters of which he had spoken untold.

"Soon after this George seemed to fall asleep. It was near three in the morning, and I think he slept for half an hour. He woke, clutching at the counterpane, and calling, 'Michael, Michael! wake, wake!' I said, 'In heaven's name, George, do you think that I could sleep?' Then he said, 'Up, up, lift me up.' I raised him, and he clung to me, whispering, 'It is no use, Michael, I must go home.' His cheeks were wet, his forehead was all in lines, but his mouth smiled. I said, 'Home, George?' not understanding, and he said, 'I must go there now in my mind, I mean, instead of looking from here for help. If there is a forgiving God, it is there only I can find Him—where I was born—where I left Him—where I lost Him. Why did I come away? Ah, to get back! Michael, Michael, to get back!'"

Ambray's folded arms loosened and fell, like a band suddenly snapped, by the motion of his chest.

"He lay—George lay—with his head on my shoulder," Michael went on, "and his voice close at my ear. 'Now, now,' he said, 'I will think of it, I will remember it, while my life—is going from me; my life—does that mean my soul, Michael? is this what they call the spirit—this strength, that is tearing itself up from every part of me like a tree with roots and fibres not loosed by age, but cruelly wrenched while it has strongest hold?' And I said, 'And by my hand, George, by my hand.' 'Hush!' he whispered; 'let me remember, and perhaps this life—this soul, is it?—may go to the place I am remembering, seeing——'"

By this time Nora had risen and come close to Michael, up at whose face she gazed almost breathlessly.

Ambray stood—still with his back to them—looking out through the open door upon those scenes towards which Michael showed George's last thoughts had struggled.

"For some little time," continued Michael, "he lay with his arms over my shoulders, trembling very much, and making sudden starts. 'George,' I said to him, 'is the pain so great?' (of his wound I meant), and he said, 'Yes, it is a pain to me to see it all so

faintly. Ah, have I loved it so little to have so forgotten! Yes, hold me higher. I begin to see the shapes of the fields; the mist goes; grand, grand downs! A very world of them, Michael!' and then, trembling more still, he said, 'And ah, those farm clusters, Michael! Clumsy, sweet—sweet rustic bouquets of ricks—and houses—and homes dotting the dear horizon and the valley's slopes and deeps—shall I *never* see them any more—never, never smell their bleaching hay or wood-fires in the breeze? my breeze that turns the mill. It is very dark. God! let me find the way—home—father—father, father!'"

"George!" cried Ambray, stretching out his arms and lifting his face to the scenes last pictured without brush or pencil by the dying painter, "O let him find me! O let the wandering spirit come!"

At this cry Michael paused and struggled with himself; then went on, speaking more quickly like one feeling his endurance to be near an end.

"When George had said—what I have said—he shook and clung so, that I knew that the end must be coming. At last he let me lay him down, and was still—he was very still. In a minute I saw his lips move. I hoped he might be praying, for he had not, I think, prayed yet. But when I had sate for some time hoping this, he moaned out as if he had but just found voice after trying for it long, 'Michael, do you hear me?' I said, 'God help me, no, George, I have not heard you. What is it, dear lad?' Then he looked at me, and put his hand on mine and said, 'You will not let them want, my father and mother, so that they will cry out against me for my neglect, my cruelty?' I went on my knees at his bed, and my answer was, 'George Ambray, to-night as I have sat beside you I have sworn to God to go to the High Mills and be your father's servant if it be possible to make him take me, and under cover of this service be a son to him so far as he may let me.' 'You will!' George said smiling, and with faint eyes running over. 'You will go to the old people and work for them.' 'Ay, like a slave,' I said, 'and guard them like a dog, grateful to God if He will let me give my life to them for yours that I have lost for them so early.' The comfort of this promise, for it did comfort him much, reached him just in time. His face changed so much and so suddenly, that I turned stiff as I knelt watching. Then I saw the wish to speak torturing him, and bent down and strained my very soul to hear. I heard at last, 'My father!' and I nodded and said,

‘Comfort, George, he shall hear from me some day how he was with you at this last. And the lady,’ I said, ‘the lady whose life is this night ruined, shall I tell *her* this too?’ He looked at me; I thought a great trouble came in his eyes. I waited, looking as well as listening for the answer. Fresh pain seized him; it was his last; in it he turned to me with a look that seemed to mean ‘*I would* speak of other things, but I have but time for the one nearest to my heart,’ and so looking cried out once more, ‘My father!’ And his head fell, his teeth locked—it was over.”

“His first word—and—his last!” murmured Ambray, looking upward in tenderest exultation; suddenly he seemed to remember Nora, and the pain she might be suffering at George’s apparent neglect of her in his last hours, for he went to her and touched her shoulder, saying—

“Forgive him—dear child—poor child—he loved you—yes, yes—he loved you—but father and son—father and child—there is no tie—O there can be no tie like it!—none—none.”

A touch came on Michael’s hand. It was Mrs. Ambray’s—cold and trembling.

“Was it without one prayer?” she asked; “without one word of prayer?”

“Prayer!” cried Ambray, turning upon them before Michael could answer. “And why should *he* have prayed? Does the babe on its mother’s breast cry for its mother? Does the bird nested in the corn cry out for food? Do you suppose God was not glad enough to take back such work of His, and that George did not know it? Go on.”

“I said—I said that it was over,” pleaded Michael.

“Over!” cried Ambray, turning upon him fiercely; “why the breath has scarcely left his lips—I mean—I will know all the rest—but perhaps you hurried him warm into his grave—my slaughtered lamb! Did you so?—butcher! Where is he buried? Was there no inquest?”

“There was an inquest,” answered Michael, “the verdict, *manslaughter against a person or persons unknown*. He was buried in the churchyard at Thames Dutton, on the eighth of December. I sat in his room all the five days and four nights. On the night before they came to nail his coffin down, I was half mad to think he was so soon to be shut from sight and none belonging to him to see him before it was so. His face was wonderful, most beautiful. That it should be closed up without any eye more dear to him than mine to look on it, or any lips to

set a parting kiss on it, unmanned me more than all the rest. I asked myself is there *no* honour I can do him at this last hour? None? Then I thought of my little sister I had offended him about so often by keeping her out of his sight; a little lass of fifteen she was—fair as a lily, and as weak and simple; and I was over proud and careful of her, and often made George angry by sending her away from us when she would come to look at his pictures; I am very sorry—but—she is my only sister. I went up and brought her down, amazed, out of her sleep. There was a tall white flower upon the staircase window—I don’t know the name of it, but it is common; we always have one there in the winter. Not a week before, George had seen my sister looking at it, half opened, and had said to me, ‘Why Michael, soon you will have to tell me which is which,’ and I had been vexed and sent her to her work. I remembered this as I brought her down past the flower that night, and I told her to gather it and bring it with her. While she was doing so I saw out in the moonlight the two men coming across the green to nail the coffin. So I made her hurry and lay her flower beside him—the long stalk at his side, and the large blossom on his shoulder—and I made her kiss him for each of the three I was cheating of this last sight of him. Then the quiet knock came at the street door, and I took the child in my arms and carried her fainting to her mother, and my father came down with me to see—to see it done, and it was done.”

Ambray had gone and stood before the portrait of George that hung over the mantel-piece, and was looking up at it with folded arms and eyes full of ecstatic light and tears, to keep which from falling he held his rugged brows dragged up.

When he had been so for some time after Michael had ceased speaking, he suddenly threw up his clasped hands towards the picture, crying in a low, thick voice—

“A flower to honour *you*! What flower ever opened upon earth fit for such close fellowship with such a face? Oh beautiful! Oh cruelly used! George, George!”

Helplessly as a child might sit and watch the up-curved wave from which it cannot run—darkening and foaming in suspended force before its break and rush—the three watched Ambray in the silence that followed this cry, at once so scornful and so tender.

When at last the face was lifted from the hands wherein it had fallen, and turned

towards them, its expression was one of simple recollection and horror.

"Why, Esther!" he exclaimed. "Nora! God help our miserable, helpless law! Do you know I verily believe this man will escape hanging."

As in his passionate declaration of this fear he flung his hands towards where Michael sat stooping as if he had been half crushed by a weight and could not straighten himself, Nora turned quickly in shuddering remonstrance, as Michael had seen her do when the life of a worm or fly was threatened. She said nothing; but

the turning of her head, the quick breath, the shudder, told him all that he dared yet ask of God concerning her—whether he was a guilty, despicable wretch in her eyes, or only a most unfortunate man.

This thing, slight as it was, sent a thrill of warmth, of life, through his chilled and stunned senses, and he was able to lift up his head and look with gentleness at Ambray as he stood before him.

"I came to work it out, master; I could do no more," he pleaded.

"Hold your tongue," said Ambray, white and shrill with fury; "call the insult of living



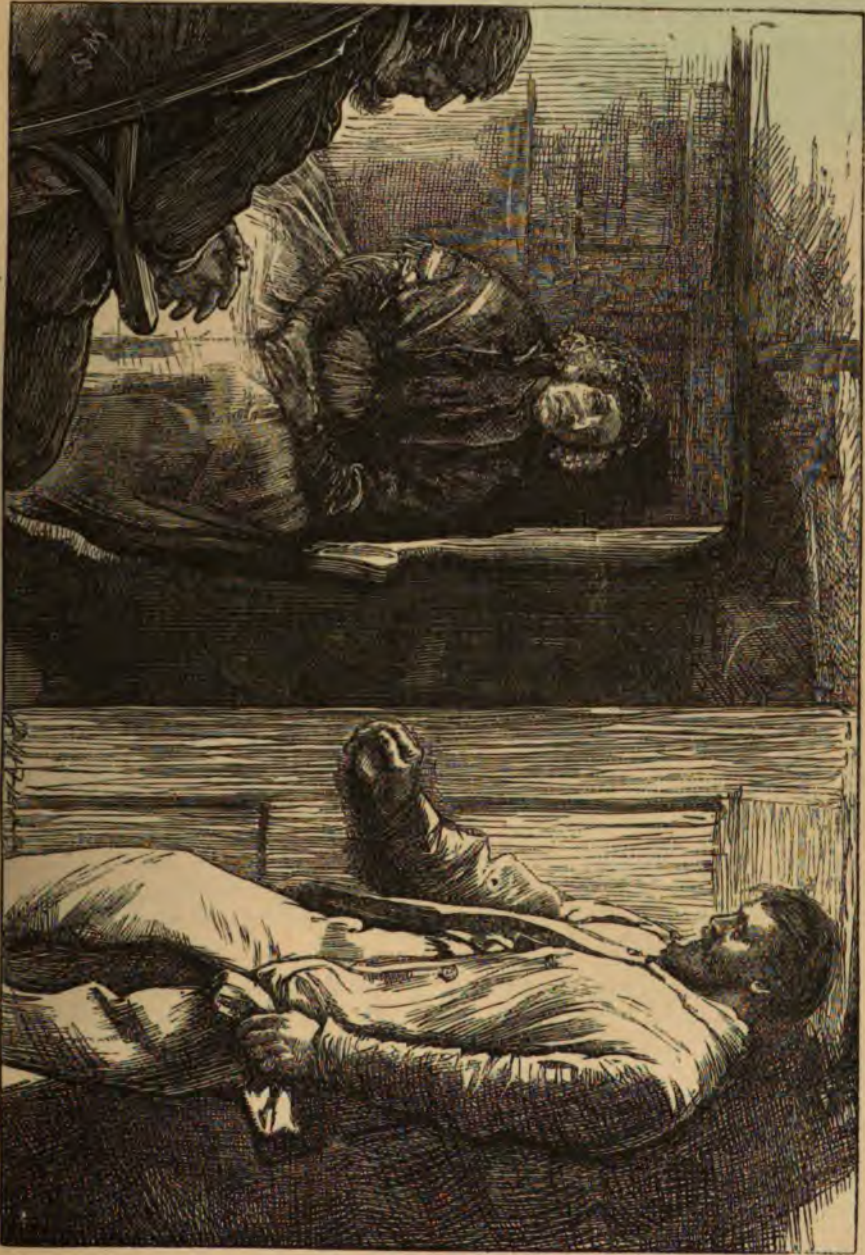
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in my presence and grinding my corn—work—and old as I am I—I will take the law in my own hands."

"Oh, John, John!" cried Mrs. Ambray, coming between them; "have you not both enough to suffer without talking of *more* punishment—more misery?"

"I will," cried Ambray, "if they will not punish him, or if he tries to slip the law, I'll take it in my own hands. No punishment! Why I'd rather appear before that boy's grandfather and uncles with a halter round my own neck than have to tell them that his

murderer lives—goes free. But who talks of it? Here, Esther, you must go—go to two or three people that I will tell you of; an! Nora go to General Milwood's—I must have advice and help. And yet—friends! friends! I dread 'em! I've a good mind to have him up to London—myself—and hear what the law can do—myself. I will. That's what I'll do. To-morrow is Tuesday. There'll be Dynely's cart going to the Bay. But what is this man to be done with all night? Can no one advise me, or help me? What shall I do with him?"



"HE OPENED THE DOOR. AMBRAY WAS SITTING RIGHT BEFORE IT."

"Ambray! Ambray!" cried Michael, rising and turning upon him with eyes big with pity, reproach, and sorrowful scorn. "Do you think all your lawing, even if it brought death itself, is more to me compared with your grief than a sparrow's peck to a man upon the rack? I did not wish to shun the law; it was not the fear of that kept me from stopping at the first surgeon's with that poor lad—if all had come out at once I should have had evidence enough on my side to make my punishment a mere nothing. I am certain of it—certain. But if all the law could do, supposing the utmost had been done, would it have paid you for his loss, would it have given you bread, and one to serve you in your need and loneliness, and kept you from cursing the man who had brought all this upon you? If the law could have comforted you by having me, it should have had me; for it was this was my great dread and turned me coward—this that has come upon me after all. Well, if the law can comfort you now, let it, let it! But to talk as if no prison were strong enough to hold one night a man for whom all the world, all life is a prison, till you set him free by your forgiveness, is a mockery, an insult even I will not bear. Ha, master! how am I speaking? I beg your pardon—I do—forgive me! but, indeed, you do not know. You do not know me, or you would feel that to imprison me, to bind me to you any faster than I am bound already, is like tying a hair round hands fettered with iron. Let me go. I will be in the mill when you want me."

The miller made no movement to detain him, but when he had reached the gate at the end of the little garden, Michael knew the tall figure was in the door-way looking after him and watching him up the mill-field.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TILL he had seen Nora crossing the Buckholt fields, Michael never moved from the window from which he had watched Ambray all the long August morning.

By this time the sun was setting; all the colours of the downs were turning soft and sad under the shadows. As Nora went home with her back to the west, her shadow lay before her half across the field; and Michael watched its weary sway and the weary form following it till the little pane of glass through which he looked seemed to thicken and darken, and he could see it no more.

He got up and went to the window that looked down on the strip of road where he could see the team.

A large trim brewer's dray was standing before it.

Michael no sooner caught sight of it than he took his cap, but forgetting to put it on, ran out of the mill and across the field to Ambray's cottage.

He opened the door. Ambray was sitting right before it.

"Gillied's dray is here—at the Team," he said. "I cannot rest any more than you; why should we wait till morning?"

Ambray half rose, but his wife coming between them, placed her hands tremblingly on his shoulder and pushed him back in his chair.

"No, no," she whispered with her lips on his burning forehead. "In the morning Nora will bring us money. You have no money now. What can you do without? Wait till the morning."

Then turning quickly towards Michael, she drew him out, whispering angrily—

"Why did you come? I had but just quieted him. He has been like a madman. Go," she said, sinking her voice still lower, drawing him further out, and pressing his arm with her shaking hands—"go in the dray yourself. Get from him, and save us from further misery! Go!"

Michael went from the cottage straight to the Team, but only to stand staring at the dray till it drove off, when he again returned to the mill.

He groped about in the dusk over such little tasks of labour and forethought as the absence of himself and Ambray, and the coming of a stranger, seemed to render necessary.

It was not so much a sense of duty which made him do this, as it was an instinct that impelled him to guard himself from surrendering thus early in the night to the frightful sense of injustice, misery, and despair that was gaining fresh strength in him every moment.

The night came on hot and dark.

He was passing one of the windows on the shooting-floor when he saw a light in the mill-field.

The instant that Michael looked, the light showed him a figure a few yards away from it, which he recognised as Ma'r S'one's.

Seeing this, he fixed his whole attention on the light, and saw the gleam of a white hand, then of a face, then he felt rather than heard a step; while a name trembled on his lips.

It was Nora carrying a lantern under her shawl.

She came to the mill-door and stood listening.

PART VIII.

CHAPTER XXVI. I.



WHEN Michael saw Nora he shrank back into a corner of the dusky little room. He stood like a stone figure carved there when the wall was made; his head and shoulders bent so as to fit under the sloping ceiling; his brow s

drawn up; his nostrils wide; his lips kept apart by thick-coming breaths; his eyes turned to the opening in the floor with inexpressible dread.

His torture was to begin afresh he felt. Nora, unable to believe in or endure the idea he had given of George's faint regard for her, had come to demand more of him: to implore him by all he had lost to her to tell her if there had really been no message, no last word forgotten in Ambray's terrifying presence, and which he could now remember and repeat to her. The thought of this stricken widowed heart coming to plead to him against the double widowhood his history of George's last days suggested in hinting at the death of George's love before his own death, filled Michael with such alarm and pain, he had not the power to move when Nora knocked, or to answer when she opened the mill door and called his name,—

"Michael Swift."

He pressed back more tightly, straining his lowered head and shoulders against ceiling and wall as if he meant to lift and throw them off like some movable burthen.

"Ma'r's Michael!" cried Ma'r S'one.

Michael heard them come up as far as the grinding-floor, and stand still there.

"He is not here, Ma'r S'one," said Nora under her breath. "He has gone."

"'Cline our 'erts! he's aarf!" answered Ma'r S'one lower down the mill.

The dots of light from the lantern holes moved from where they had been resting tremblingly on the wall, by which was the square opening leading to the steps.

No sooner did Michael grow conscious that his visitors were giving up their search for him and going away, than the idea of being left alone to the long night, the bitter morning, the strange journey, the terrible companion, became suddenly so insupportable he could not keep his agony from bursting from him.

"Ma'r S'one!" he cried in a kind of frenzy, "Ma'r S'one!"

After a short pause, a voice from below answered tremblingly, and as if remonstrating against some influence that would hold it silent—

"'Cline our 'erts to keep this la'! Hollo! Ma'r's Michael! where be?"

By this time Michael was repentant of his cowardice, his cry.

The dots of light came back upon the wall; they danced higher, passed to the ceiling, the dusk lightened.

First appeared the intricate embroidery of the back of Ma'r S'one's smock collar—then his head, its silver hair flat with the sweat of a harvest day's labour; then a timorous hand grasping the rope balustrade, an enormous boot, hob-nailed, clay-coloured, and a mere thread of a gaitered leg attached, a struggle, a little panting and creaking, and Ma'r S'one was landed on the shooting-floor.

Nora, better used to the mill-steps, rose up to Michael's view, with her lantern in her hand and her light about her, gently, softly, as mist from the hollows at harvest—a vision as wraith-like and tender as the unexpected image of the moon in dark waters, to eyes too full of tears to look upward for the moon herself.

Michael, who had been unable to look anywhere yet but down deeper and deeper into his great sorrow, finding suddenly this light and loveliness in its black depth, felt his soul hushed, awed, and for the moment mysteriously comforted. It was now that he felt for the first time with strange joy and almost with terror that the sweetness of her presence to him was a fact that was to remain unchanged by all that had happened this day, and that being unchanged was too truly

unchangeable. He at once suffered over this feeling and gloried in it. He gloried in it as one unassailable treasure that neither Nora, nor Ambray, nor law could take from him, let all do their worst. He suffered over it because of the thought that it would be useless to him as known but unreachable wealth to a starving man.

Nora did not approach any nearer than sufficed for her to set her lantern down, and then lifted her eyes and saw Michael looking like some half-human bat; for from the corner where he stood the walls with their crossed and recrossed laths spread round him like dark, sinewy wings, of which his figure, with its bowed head, and arms laid back, seemed the centre.

He strained back closer as she raised her eyes to his, catching her breath, and shuddering at the sight of him. She saw the misery in his eyes, but had no leisure from her own sorrow to give it notice or thought. This sorrow—Michael's own gift—looking up at him from eyes so surrendered to it that it and their beauty seemed one strange light, so overcame him that the large drops fell from his own, making black spots in the flour dust on the floor.

"Why have you not gone?" asked Nora.

She spoke in a low voice, and sighed afterwards, as one watching by the dead speaks low and then sighs, remembering how indifferent alike to silence and sound are the ears they guard.

Her voice was awful to Michael, bringing him suddenly into the secret chamber of her sorrow, and to the re-opened coffin where the young athlete lay, still challenging his last conqueror, matching the strength of his dead beauty and youth against the worms.

"Why have you not gone?" repeated Nora. This time she spoke wearily and reproachfully, as if wondering how he could retain her from a vigil so sad and sacred as her soul must keep that night.

"Gone!" echoed Michael, looking down on the black drops on the floor, and not knowing what he answered.

"Yes," said Nora, with a yet more weary impatience; "I am surprised you are still here. You must know that it is better for you to be away out of his reach. You must know we shall have enough to bear. Go—pray go!"

"Go!" Michael again repeated after her.

"Yes; do you not understand? We wish you out of his way. There is danger for both of you while he knows where you are. We all feel you had better go. Now do you understand?"

"Yes, yes," answered Michael, clutching the rafters on either side of him, and pressing with his stooping shoulders and head against the walls and ceiling till all the slight mill-top shook, and Ma'r S'one looked round, murmuring, "'Cline our 'erts!" "I understand. It is expected I shall go—run away—escape—hide myself."

"Certainly it is," answered Nora.

"Like a murderer," said Michael with excessive gentleness, but such anguish, that Nora, for the first time since she had been in the mill, had her attention drawn to him for his own sake. Stepping up to the floor, she saw his face fully, and its misery.

Michael perceived this, and was near falling upon his knees and letting out all the longing of his soul for a little pity, but then he also saw that she no sooner had given him and his fearful plight this brief attention than her own sorrow, growing jealous, seized all her soul back again to itself, and its object; and the impatient wringing of the hands, with which she turned away from him, he interpreted into the complaint, "O why,—why should I be troubled with this man's misery—have I not enough to bear—is it not unnatural that I should have to think of him—to pity him? Why does he not go out of the path of those he has bereaved so awfully?"

This double change in her was watched by Michael with a wistfulness as patient and meek as it was intense.

At the last change he came from where he had stood, and taking up the lantern placed it in Ma'r S'one's hesitating hands.

"Hold it high now, Ma'r S'one," he said; "and low when you are out—so—so when you pass the corner of the ten acre, and this way as you cross Stone-Slip—be careful there."

Then turning to Nora, he laid one hand on the wall and extended the other toward the steps, with that gentle eloquence of gesture so un-English, and perhaps peculiar to himself.

"If it would be any real good to you, my going," he said, "I would go; but I know it would not; he would never rest till—the thing was brought before the world. Why not let it be? Do not trouble—I will be my master's keeper, as well as his prisoner. He shall come to no harm while he is doing this against me—and then——"

Nora looked up at him, stung by what she thought this wretched man's folly, into something like curiosity, and repeating impatiently, "And then?"

This look—the first that had ever come upon him from her—not questioning of others,

but directed at himself, and at his fate solely—for the moment made Michael unable to speak. He lowered his eyes, that she might not see their great gratitude, and withdrew the cause of it in shuddering self-reproach.

"And then," he said, as soon as he could speak (strong self-control pressing on him made his voice as sweetly and truly modulated as the sound of some instrument at the touch of fingers full at once of tenderness and power); "then, when all is over, and he feels he has got justice—when he has had the law on me—he will be easier to manage—more satisfied and quiet. But do not trouble, he will get no hurt on my account, either from me or for me—unless I really did as you say—escape from him now—that would madden him."

A sense of conviction came to Nora, but she repelled it.

"This must not be," she said, looking up at him with eyes full of helpless distress. "As *he*—as George forgave you"—a mournful authority stole into her voice in saying this—"you shall not suffer the same as if he had not done so. You must know that. You must know his wish is sacred to us. For his sake, then," she added, more coldly and imperiously, "we wish you to go before more harm is done, before his name and life—"

She ceased, turning away her face; then, again fronting Michael, said firmly—

"And his *death* shall be brought in such a way before the world. You must question no more what your duty is. You must go. Surely you will not—you dare not—refuse to do so, when you know we—I wish it—require it."

"You would be blamed," said Michael gently. "I would do what you wish, but that what I must do for you—your good, your peace, your best chance of peace, is different from that. No. It must be gone through with; it is better it should be gone through with. I must stay. My master must find me here in the morning."

"I must send others to reason with you; I cannot," said Nora, drawing her shawl closer, and laying her hand on the rope balustrade.

Ma'r S'one, ever since Michael gave him the lantern, had been painfully absorbed in trying to remember and to practise the lesson he had received as to its use, startling Nora and Michael, and making his own small eyes blink, by darting the light about in all directions.

When Nora began to descend the steps,

he followed, holding the lantern so as to cast the light well behind him, and turning a look of almost frenzied anxiety on Michael to see if he was acting according to his orders.

Michael quietly took it from him and went down with it, giving it back into his eager but nervous hands at the mill door.

Nora turned here suddenly and looked at Michael.

He knew at once the thing he so dreaded was coming.

"Michael Swift," she said, "you have acted rather strangely with regard to myself once or twice. I should not have noticed it—*now* I must. I must ask you to tell me truly, as you would have your God deal mercifully with you in this great trouble that is on you, if you have been tempted to keep back some other message of George Ambray's than those you have given?"

Michael looked into Nora's searching eyes with a profound and lowly sympathy. It was evident to her that as he looked at her his thoughts went deeper into the grief that prompted the questioner than the question itself.

"Oh, 'Miss Ambray!' he said at last, his voice and eyes full of reverence and pity. "George could not understand you. Your letters, your beautiful letters—forgive me, but they were lost upon him. He knew that they were beautiful; he said so to me often as he read them; but—"

"To *you*!" cried Nora in haughty and sharp pain.

"But," continued Michael, not startled from his train of thought, "he read those wise and beautiful, most beautiful passages of comfort, as if—as if it was from a book; he read them, not—not taking them as—as a man perishing of thirst takes water—as sweet astonishing answers to those questions that trouble and disappointment makes one ask oneself without any hope of having them answered. George was a boy; he had not come to want these things you gave him. He suffered; but as yet a little money that would make him welcome among his friends was what gave him most comfort, was what made him as happy as could be. A five-pound note in a letter was more to him than wise, beautiful words. He could not help it, any more than a child; it was so; it was his nature. He would say to me, 'Why, Michael, there's not a man in England gets such letters as I do. Bless her! I'll put this by and read it to-morrow; we mustn't lose a minute of this tide,' and there, upon his mantel-piece, the letter would be left, an evening, a day,

sometimes two or three days, and I—I, who had been so wonderstruck, so lost and dumb in hearing him read the beginning as to make him look at me and say, 'Ah, poor old Michael, *you* don't understand this sort of thing'—I would have to see it there, to touch it in sorting his things, to hold it in my hand, open. Oh, it was then I knew for the first time I was a patient man."

"What of his letters?" asked Nora, hiding her sting under a look of angry suspicion. "Were all destroyed?"

"Destroyed!" repeated Michael, shrinking a little from the advance of the wandering ray of Ma'r S'one's lantern. "Yes, yes, his letters were destroyed."

"I asked you," said Nora sternly, "were *all* his letters destroyed?"

If Michael had not known Ma'r S'one to be the most harmless creature in existence, he would certainly have strongly suspected him of "malice aforethought" at this moment, for his lantern light rested steadily on his face.

"A few—I think a few were—were not destroyed," he answered.

"Were these which were saved mine?" asked Nora.

"There might—yes, there might be some of yours, certainly. I could not say—not positively—to the contrary."

"Michael Swift, if *you* have these letters, give them to me."

"In the morning then," answered Michael, scarcely to be heard. "I will give them in the morning."

"Have you them *here*?"

"In the morning," cried Michael imploringly. "I will give them in the morning."

"*Have* you them *here*?"

"Yes, they are *here*."

"Then give them to me instantly."

Ambray, in one of the fits of magnanimity common to most tyrants, had given up the huge deal desk in the corner of the ground-floor to Michael's exclusive use. To this Michael now went, and in a moment returned from it with a packet in his two hands, looking down at it as he came.

"Why!" exclaimed Nora the instant she saw them, "these *are* my letters—these are all my letters."

"Yes, these are *all* your letters."

He did not immediately give into her outstretched hand the packet, but held it, looking down at it, his chin on his breast.

"I have but two other books in the world," he said gently; "my Bible and my Shakespeare. And this," he added, giving the packet into her hand with a smile, that seemed half

light half water in his eyes, "*this* was the key to both. I never understood them till *this* taught me how. Take it, take it; the night's work is complete!"

"You are a strange and most unfortunate man," said Nora, turning towards the door. "I can say no more; others must reason with you about this perversity."

She went out sighing, with a sense of a sorrow that she could not look into because of her own sorrow. And Ma'r S'one, after turning to Michael and crying with tremulous sympathy, but in a whisper, for fear of offending Nora, "Oh, Ma'rs Michael, Lord ha' marcy 'pon us, and 'cline our 'erts to keep this la!" tottered after her, casting the light of his lantern brightly back into the mill.

"Ay, George, it is complete," cried Michael, looking up into the black, hot, starless night. "It is complete!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THOUGH Michael found himself acting as if he had resolved upon the course which he was taking, he had not really done so. He was not sure the morning would find him as he had told Nora it should—still in Ambray's power. A strong instinct that it would do so had moved him to say what he had said to her; but when she was gone he considered her words and Mrs. Ambray's as to his flight, and fell into a state of tormenting and hopeless indecision.

Meanwhile he had a fearful sense of Time marching away stealthily and silently his only defences—the night and early morning hours.

Sleepless, and sick with fatigue and want of food, which he had not tasted since the bread fell from his hand when the reapers had passed at breakfast time, he sat and listened to the sharp rasping cry of the corn-crake and the chirping of the crickets, the only musicians awake to chant their shrill and jubilant harvest song. Sometimes—but very seldom—a low rich murmur went through and through the corn as if these noisy creatures had disturbed the earth's slumber, and made her heart sigh under its rich burthen and whisper "hush!" and the whisper spread from field to field all over the dark undulations of the valley—the wheat uttered it mellowly, the barley rustled with it more than the wheat, the rye whispered it more airily than all. The long fields bore it to the sea, the sea turned the small low hush into a mighty one.

Michael, whose sorrow could not be

"hushed," sat at the open mill-door, taking from the night that additional and profound dreariness which is so often found in the insensibility of outward things to human suffering. In natures submissive and gentle like his, thought goes on still wonderingly and inquiringly under the greatest sorrow, the mind lifts itself and looks with patience and awe on the new and dark world into which it is cast, and sees so much sooner than the passion-blinded mourner the small rifts in the clouds where stars may come, or the light on the horizon from which the day may break. The first stars in the rifts that Michael's patient eyes beheld were the thoughts of his home, and of having at last some sympathy from those who he felt could but learn all he had suffered and was yet to suffer with amazement and pity. More than this Michael did not expect from his family when the truth should be made known to them; but the thought of this pity in the dear faces gave him of itself much comfort, having been denied all sympathy so long. It seemed to him that no sentence which could be passed on him could be so very hard when accompanied by his father's indignant protestations, his mother's silent, clinging embrace, his brothers' black, helpless, but sympathetic looks, and his little sister's tears and caresses. These were the stars in the rifts; but the sun might rise—there might be the deep, glad comfort of hearing that Nora herself was turning merciful towards him as her grief grew less bitter and absorbing. She had friends and money at her command, who could tell what she might not do towards lessening his punishment? and what so sweet as liberty coming by a gift from her hand?

So sat this meek Daniel all the night, guarding himself with humble and gentle hopes, against the lions of disappointment, injustice, terror, and despair, that crouched around him in the darkness.

The morning came, not yet with any sound of human life and work, but that first dewy glory of the day so seldom seen except by the eyes that wake to suffering or lonely toil.

Michael's spirit, which had known communion with so many of these hours, gazed up even on this daybreak with the shrinking tenderness of a child at the aggrieved eyes of a beautiful mother teaching him with tears that pain must be given him for his good.

This warm and lovely morning, like a mother indeed, took Michael from the black nurse night; and with the fresh songs of her

bright lips, and the warmth and light of her smile, that awakened the rest of the world, soothed him to the sleep he so much needed.

The morning came—the working morning, with the ring of the anvil, the creaking of cottage gates and draw-wells, and the chopping and breaking of faggots.

When Michael opened his eyes, the first thing they saw was a face at the window, looking in upon him with an expression which brought all the truth at once to his mind. The face belonged to a labourer of Mrs. Grist's; he had seen it at the Team on the first day of his arrival at the High Mills, and now the sight of it instantly brought to his recollection the kind of terror he had had in looking on the assembled faces that day, and in wondering what judges their owners would prove if his strange case should ever come before them. They had stared at him then with no more regard for what he thought than if he had been a dog. This morning, when face after face closed up the window as the signal was passed that Michael was awake, there was the same expression, accompanied with one of blank unhesitating abhorrence.

He rose, and for the first time since his confession felt a passion for escape, for release from the torture preparing for him.

At this movement, and at his wild glance round, figures filled up the door, and he knew he no longer had any choice as to keeping his promise to his master.

He sat down again, only wondering now what the time was, how long it would be before half-past nine, when Dynely, the carrier, would drive up his tilted cart to the Team.

CHAPTER XXX.

MANY a morning had Michael watched the loading and the slow laborious setting forth of this one and only public conveyance to and from Lamberhurst and the Bay. He had heard of it before he came to the High Mills, George had made him laugh with his description of its progress and adventures on the few occasions when necessity had obliged him to make use of it. Little had he thought to hear the words "Dynely's cart," which had always been uttered with a smile by George, used by his father at such a moment, and with such meaning, as he had done last night.

Was it nine yet? he wondered, or had he even more than half an hour to sit here with these eyes upon him! (He forgot, as people under great mental suffering do forget, that

half his sickness and deathly fear was caused by want of food and common physical exhaustion. He thought all his suffering was caused by the horror of his position, and so was all the more alarmed for himself and his fortitude during the days that were to come.

With a breath of relief he looked up when he heard a stir amongst his gaolers, and one of them announced, in a low excited voice,

"Here be Armbray!"

From the lethargic excitement, mutterings, and nudgings that ensued, Michael understood that there was something even more noticeable than the approach of his master being watched, and presently saw that the old man was not alone.

He had obtained an order for Michael's arrest, and two men to take charge of him to London.

Mrs. Ambray came behind them with some breakfast for the prisoner; which it was reported all over Lamberhurst, with righteous horror, he thanked her for, and ate and drank "like a Christian."

Ambray, as he approached his servant, and delivered him up to the men he had brought, neither looked nor avoided looking at Michael's face, raised towards him with a wistful curiosity, in which there was no reproach, no consciousness of self at all.

Mrs. Ambray stood watching Michael eat the food she had brought with no more feeling for him on her white, absorbed, and pain-drawn face than if he had been a dog that she was feeding.

Michael, as he looked at her and saw this, thought the bread he was eating must choke him. They had been such friends—once or twice she had said to him "my son," giving him, all unconsciously, a foretaste of the greatest joy and triumph he ever wished to know in this life—the triumph of being called "my son" by Ambray when all should be known, the heavy penalty paid, the pardon earned and rendered.

As for Ambray, it was easy to see he only now lived and breathed in his purpose of punishing his son's destroyer—of "having the law upon him."

"It will cheat me; it will give me as little as it dares, I know," he had said to his wife; "it always does. But what I *can* have out of it I *will*, and then—*then I'll leave him to God.*" And with what prayers for divine vengeance he would do this, his voice and thickening veins across his brow avowed.

"Leave him to God *now*, John," Mrs. Ambray had implored. "You hear what

they all say, how little his punishment can be except from his own conscience. Oh, stay and comfort your poor dear heart—and *me*. I do think you forget I *am* that lad's, that precious angel's mother, I really do!"

Ambray turned upon her impatiently, opening his mouth to ask her how she supposed he could have endured her existence near him so long if it had not been for his remembrance of this fact; but seeing her pathetic old eyes caught the sense of his words before they were uttered, he was satisfied, and shut his mouth again without speaking.

In answer to another appeal from his wife and niece together, he had cried out, trembling all over at the very idea of the inaction they advised:

"Why, why, one would think you were mad! What in the world *could* I do if I did *not* prosecute this man? Sit here, walk out, lie down at night, live on this land that was my father's, hearing—as I should—no sheep bleat but what would mind me of our last lamb of the fold crying out to me in death! Seeing with my failing sight nothing but *him*," and Ambray had started, and seemed actually looking on the vision that he called up, and trembling as if in the very presence he imagined—"but *him*, my pale boy, bled to death, white, beckoning me with his flower, as white! O Esther! O Nora! *You* have cost me this! Say no more, oppose me no more!"

So Michael, and his two new acquaintances, and Ambray, met the astonished carrier at the Team, and were made room for in the tilted cart, among the parcels, baskets, and two women, each with a brood of small sun-bonnets and infantine smocks. From amidst these Michael's eye soon drew a little friend to sit upon his knee and be a shield for his stooping face against the glances of such wayfarers as might chance to know him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SITTING cramped under the tilt of Dynely's cart Michael, from behind his little golden-haired shield, lifted his eyes to take their last look at the High Mills.

Though now quite still, while all their kindred, standing few and far between on the faint horizon, kept up a dreamy motion, the High Mills looked instinct with life that morning, not unlike, Michael thought, two vigorous gigantic grasshoppers braced ready for a leap.

How different all was from what it had be

that March day when he first came into the village! He had thought his new world wonderful enough then—and indeed its beauty had been great—but at that time it was like some lovely beggar maiden sparsely clad and fed, her green gown patched with russet, her sweet breath fitful and uncertain, now wild, now soft. Since then, like a rich prince, had come the summer, and married her; arraying her in golden harvest robes, and lavishing upon her all the glories of his kingdom.

Through a slit in the tilt Michael's great eyes, worn and sad, but moist with good-will and liking, took this last look; and he bore the picture with him, and often saw it afterwards in prison.

Yes, in the exercise-yard at morning, beyond the cropped heads and listless figures, in all their uniform and insignia of vice and sorrow, beyond the little band of the defeated soldiers of sin, bent on their monotonous and inglorious march, beyond the white walls that grow close, and become as a film upon the eyeball, and press in upon the very soul, beyond or through all this would rise that fair, green world.

In, all its August glory it would come before him; the woods spreading up the hill-side in great dark masses; no foliage, no separate form, nor any variety of colour apparent; but only the dull, soft, velvety undulating ground; the swelling corn-fields, and those farm clusters for the soft russet tints of which George Ambray's eyes had yearned in death; the little thatched cottages, each with its stack of faggots near it, almost as big as itself, reminding one of a white straw-hatted master and black naked serf; the emerald meadows speckled with sheep; and over all such glorious abundance and warmth of colour, such fervour and excess of it in spots and on things where no human artist would dream of expending his skill. Round all rose the soft line of hills against the sky, like a new wave of earth just up-gathered, faint-tinted, humid, as if light shone through them.

On these and over all were the mills, looking scarcely like fixtures at all, but newly alighted, busy-winged creatures, incidental to the time of year, to the season of the corn.

Michael did not think of bearing it away to be his prison picture as he looked at it from the tilted cart; he thought of the harvest, of the contrast it was to *his* harvest which he was reaping from that little grain of

hope he had sown here, and looked for through all the summer, and which had come up such a bitter tare.

The possession of that hope had been the only thing which had seemed to render life supportable since George's death; and now he was obliged to own, as he glanced at Ambray, that it had been an unnatural one; that all his struggle had been against the laws of nature.

So all now was over. The stain must be left upon the mill-stone; heaven would send him no such wind as should enable him to grind it out. George's old father and mother must be left childless and servantless; and he who would have been their son and their servant bear in his soul for ever the reproach and bitterness of their thoughts of him—of their loneliness.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MICHAEL had no fear about his trial; indeed he looked forward to it with that kind of melancholy satisfaction with which a neglected member of a family will sometimes regard the idea of a long illness because of its bringing him for a time the constant remembrance and attention of those for whose sympathy he yearns.

It was the only comfort now left to him, that thought of the return to those primitive, simple, unvarnished affections, whose strength, it seemed to him, must outlive all changes. For a little while his bruised, stunned heart, might give itself up to the exquisite comfort of keen sympathy, of passionate solicitation, from the dear hearts too unsophisticated and rough for feigning. All through that hot and dreary drive among the parcels, smocks, and sun-bonnets, this quiet prisoner beguiled the time with imaginary looks, acts, and conversations of the large family in the tiny house at Thames Dutton when all should be known there. The thought that his father could feel anything but horror and sympathy at knowing all he had suffered at the time of Grant's death, never occurred to trouble him. He only pictured him and his mother trembling for his life, while his brothers would disperse in twos and talk of him, and sweet little Cicely would cry by herself till some of them found and comforted her. Dear old home! dear old times! thought Michael; there would be but the few, few years in prison—there *could* not be many—and then all would come back again—the solid honest life, with its solid, honest pleasures, and the High Mills and their story become but as a dream.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE sails of the High Mills hung motionless for seven weeks.

In that time Michael Swift, apart from his trial for the death of George Ambray, experienced a trial of a kind which few perhaps are called upon to undergo, and which ends in either giving the person so tried great and peculiar advantages over the rest of his fellow-creatures, or in utterly ruining him.

The result of this second trial of Michael's was not known to himself or to any one on earth at the time when he received his sentence for the manslaughter of George Ambray and was taken to prison. All he knew himself yet was, that his loosening hold on hope had been beaten off, as it were, finger by finger.

It was not that his case had been dealt with hardly. While caring very little *how* it went, Michael could not help feeling all through it a certain dull surprise at the leniency with which his great error was regarded by the world. It seemed to him that if he had heard his father read all this that went on from day to day so wearily as old Swift used to read out such cases, with the vague idea that no law proceedings could be *quite* legal without his judgment being passed upon them—it seemed to Michael that if he had heard his own case so read, he would have thought the prisoner ought to consider himself peculiarly fortunate in his trial. The truth was that Michael at the end of all, when he heard he was only to be imprisoned for a year, even suffered a shock at the knowledge that he would be so soon in possession of the liberty for which there seemed no use in all the world.

In *this* darkness no stars in the rifts gleamed for his wild and wandering gaze. At the time when he had lifted his eyes trustingly and gratefully to look for them in the time of his great need they had all fled. He found himself denied all sympathy in his own flesh and blood. By some strange freak of his weak intellect, ever supported by his strong obstinacy, old Joseph Swift was led into condemning his son as something a few degrees better than a murderer; and, being despotic ruler over all judgments in his own house, forced the whole family to regard him in the same light, to their great wretchedness.

Michael's spirit was so stunned and sickened within him when this state of things revealed itself, that he scarcely knew or cared

what was going on around him in the court where he stood so many hours, listening like one in a dream.

The only thing he had any interest in was the grateful and loving obstinacy of Polly Bardsley, in her refusal to give evidence against the man who had saved her grandfather's life.

Her sweet weary face turning from her questioners, her pretty flaxen hair having to be incessantly thrust back into her bonnet by her red little hands, and her petulant "*I dun know,*" in answer to all questions, haunted Michael throughout the year of his imprisonment. He often wondered to what end her rebellion against Bardsley had brought her; for Polly was only one day in court, the morning after this she had disappeared from her home, and the evidence which Bardsley and "Traps" were giving against Michael was stopped through the blind beggar's distress, and his departure in search of her.

How often Michael wondered, months afterwards, if they had met; or if the two still wandered apart through the miserable winter days, in their great darkness, like two lost familiar spirits seeking each other after death!

Joseph Swift, in his new character of martyr, which his view of Michael's calamity obliged him to assume, was so over-conscientious at the trial as to make himself thoroughly unpopular.

Michael pitied him. He knew the old man had the true Spartan spirit in him, though it was only to be the slave of a wrong idea. After the first surprise Michael showed no pain at anything he said. Sometimes when he went out of his way to mention a thing that did his son harm, the sad eyes would turn and look at him in dull, callous wonder.

The secrets which George Ambray had confided to him at his death, and which Michael had refused to tell George's father, were now revealed to the world, and proved only fresh revelations of sin and error.

Ambray heard them, and heard also the whole truth of Bardsley's story, with increased hatred towards Michael. Yet it was not he who had brought these things against George, but the evidence marshalled against him by Ambray himself which had laid open the truth; they came to light indeed so simply that Michael was amazed, and could half fancy the spirit of his friend was present, refusing to let him any longer bear the burthen of his sins.

The most striking feature of the trial was

the contrast in the position of the two fathers.

With obstinate martyrdom in his rosy little face, blue eye, and sleek silver hair, stood Joseph Swift—one of the many silly ensigns that make themselves a nuisance on life's battle-field by persisting in clutching the wrong colours to the death. Conscious rectitude, and high-minded indifference as to results, made him feel himself a hero, too great to be ever appreciated on earth; though all the time his foolish old heart ached at the sight of Michael standing so patient, reproachless, vaguely wondering.

How different the old miller looked! No blameless and clear conscience lent such light to his hollow eye, and firmness to his tall shaking form. Trembling constantly, now leaping up, now sinking prostrate, at one moment brightening and listening in passionate hope when the evidence against the prisoner seemed growing serious, at the next bent double, grinding one clenched hand in the palm of the other, he would mutter, "My boy! my boy! May he get justice in heaven, for he never will here!"

But infinitely worse than the loss of the vengeance for which he thirsted was the ill fame that rose, obscuring the brightness of his idol, and that in so doing showed Michael's character more and more honest and spotless in all but the one stain. It nearly maddened Ambray to think that he was there defending his son with such passionate vehemence, and a not too great regard for truth, yet proving him less worthy at every step, while "that absurd old Swift," with all his severity, only brought more light to shine on Michael's good life. It was bitter, too, beyond expression, for him to feel that his own faith in Michael had become stronger than any one's; that even whenever a suspicion of dishonesty or meanness of any kind rested on Michael for a moment in the course of the trial, Ambray had always a hateful confidence in its being instantly removed, or at least unmerited.

Once when Joseph Swift *did* seem about to bring something serious against Michael, when, with stern heroism in his eye, and his blue-and-white spotted handkerchief mopping away at his bald crown, he confessed that his son had two months before his departure for the High Mills committed forgery on him—his own father—Ambray's heart beat high. The next instant he fell back as if a cannon-ball had struck him—the crime proved George's, though the shame and blame had been borne by Michael, according to his last

vows to his friend. This came out through Michael's sister.

Another theme for morbid jealous thought that Ambray took with him from this trial was the recollection of Michael's manner towards his father—his sincere pity for the needless pain he was giving himself—his gentle answers when the revelations of Swift's domestic tyranny elicited comments of surprise, or caused such questions to be put to Michael as—"What? Do you mean to say that when you were earning that sum weekly your father only allowed you this? What was his reason?"

Michael, instead of explaining that in all things but good living Swift was the greatest miser on earth, would only turn his head and answer, looking with gentle respect at the excited little man, "*My father is peculiar.*" This answer was given to the same sort of question so many times by Michael in his sad self-absorption that it became famous in the court.

Mrs. Ambray, down at the High Mills, read it in the papers, and showed it to Nora with tears in her eyes, asking if it was not like the honest simple soul—if she could not hear him saying it?

When all was over, and the sentence passed, Ambray threw up his arms, and with fearful looks and words called for a Higher judgment on the prisoner, and fell down in a fit.

Michael's face was turned towards him, and appeared at most without expression except for a strained look in the eyes.

Most people who saw him thought his heart had hardened—that he had grown careless—but a lawyer who happened to know a little of a law higher than that he professed, remarked as the prisoner left the court—

"That man will come out of prison an angel or a devil."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"WELL, Ma'r S'one, so t'hopp'n begins o' Toosday. Think the weather'll bear out?"

Ma'r S'one, whose back formed one of a row of backs visible through the long latticed window of the Team, first lowered with difficulty and rested on his knee the pint pewter mug, from which he had been drinking for the sake of "peace and quiet," then, after trembling with diffidence at the honour of being addressed instead of any of his neighbours, and after glancing timidly on either side of him to see if any one had taken offence at it or would like to answer in his

stead, looked up and replied, with studied cheerfulness—

"Yees, we begin hopp'n o' Toosday, Ma'r's Dynely. Missis be dunned her hirin'—a pretty middlin' fair lot—she's got this year—not quite so rough as laarst. As fur weather, Ma'r's Dynely, there be rain somewheres, and we must hope the Arlmighty ull be over wi' it fore Toosday—but 'cline our 'erts."

"I arlwis say as a wet hopp'n's onlucky," remarked a neighbour of Ma'r S'one's in a slate-grey smock, and with as sombre a countenance.

Ma'r S'one looked as much impressed as possible, murmuring in a very low voice lest any one else should object to the remark—

"Sure!"

"Why, rain don't do t'hops no heert as I've heerd tell on," observed another of the window row, smiling with one eye and but one side of his mouth, as his pipe was in it, and wagging his head at the end of Dynely's whip as if he saw there more support to his argument than he cared to let out all at once. "Not as I've ever heard tell on, it didn't."

"Sure!" said Ma'r S'one again, as deferentially as he had done to the other speaker.

"What say yourself, Ma'r S'one?" asked Dynely, placing himself opposite the door that he might watch the tilted cart and large white horse given to backing, by which he was drawing upon himself the indignation of the several dogs waiting for their master outside the Team, and the gentler comments of the hens dozing under the holly hedge; "what say—yourself—Ma'r S'one?"

Ma'r S'one, thus appealed to, looked as startled and bewildered as a little boy at the bottom of the class suddenly asked a question which those at the top cannot answer.

At last he got up, and taking his long fork and seeking forgiveness in every eye for his presumption, answered—

"Well, Ma'r's Dynely, I don't want fur to goo an' fly in nobody's face, I don't—but 'cernin' the hops and the rain, 'cernin' them I caan't, I really caan't say as it doos 'em any good. No, Ma'r's Dynely, I caan't; and if the Lord ull be over wi' it fore Toosday—not as I'd interfere—'cline our 'erts! No."

"Doos t'hops no heert, a little rain don't," persisted the smoker at the window, still keeping his eye on Dynely's whip in its changed position, and still smiling as if he said, "You may move my argument about, but I can find it."

"Well," remarked another of the row in the window with the tone of one about to start an entirely new idea, "what I say is—

myself I doos—is as th' rain farls th' haardest on the pickers."

"That bees it, sir," averred Ma'r S'one, shaking his head sadly; "it farls haardest on the pickers and the measurer" (Ma'r S'one himself was Mrs. Grist's measurer). "See th' old people it gives the rheumatis—the rain does—and put 'em out, and they can't pick so quick. And the young folks they comes o' look out for to get married, and the rain spiles the bunnets and arl that, and *they* don't pick so quick; and then when comes measuring time, the measure bean't what they s'pected, and they arl farls on me, old and young they doos, and it's 'Look how that old Ma'r S'one's been cheatin',' and tells me I'm gett'n too old to do the measurin' 'tarl fair, and did ort to give it up—and if I gives a shake more, just for peace and quiet, there's missis ready to rail out: 'Ma'r S'one, Ma'r S'one, be this a charity hop-garden, as you bees squeezein' down the measures like that?'"

Ma'r S'one's difficult position during the hop-picking season was considered over in silence.

Conversation was slow at this hour of the afternoon, when the September sun was blazing on the heads and backs at the Team window, and the hens kept up an intermittent comfortable grumble under the hedge of the garden across the road, while the cat, like a jungle tiger, sprang about among the lettuce and herb beds to eye them from different points of view, making a rustling in the crisp vegetables as she tore off in frenzied anxiety to escape temptation.

Sometimes an observation would be made or a question put by one of the lethargic loungers in the little bar-room, and not replied to till some cart-wheels, to which all had listened, had been waited for, and had passed, and their sound died away.

"Poor old Ambray's had a time ave it since this end o' laarst year," remarked the carrier, "when I brought him home in my caart after lawin' that Michael Swift."

A lumbering sound was heard along the Tidhurst road, and listened to until it turned into the lane at the church fields towards the large hop-gardens.

"Ye'es," said some one full ten minutes after the last remark had been made. "They say—I dun know who *was* a saying—were it you, Ma'r S'one?—somebody was a sayin' they bin pooty nigh starvin' this *laarst* month."

Ma'r S'one only sighed out his favourite entreaty, and shook his head sadly.

"Old Ambray won't have nothin' to do

with Miss Nara, or she wouldn't let 'em want—not she," said the carrier.

"Be this true, Ma'r S'one?" inquired Ma'r S'one's next neighbour, "'bout old Ambray and Esther a-goin' hoppin' down a: your missis's."

"Yees," answered Ma'r S'one, turning up the end of his fork and shaking his head as he stared at it with watery eyes. "It be true

'nough; they come to arst her to let 'em an a little this hoppin'."

The Tuesday was as fine a September day as ever dawned upon the moving poles—sun-bonnets and brown hands busy at earliest light.

An hour later the tall old couple came leaning on each other to take their place and task in the busy garden.



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Both their hands shook as they first touched the hops.

Esther meekly gathered hers, but Ambray's hand fell as if it had been burnt. and he lifted his face and looked up through the lovely garlands in an ecstasy of bitterness.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Few changes but those brought by the

seasons had come to Lamberhurst during the year of Michael Swift's imprisonment.

It is true Ma'r S'one had, this hop-picking time, to be content with side views only of the weather when he came out to open the oast-house doors in the morning, his back being now so much bent as to render any other view impossible. But while such glimpses showed him fair skies, he was infinitely thankful, and ready to endure the

grumbling of the pickers with surprising patience.

Perhaps, too, the grey-walled church had a few more of those tiny dents with which it was covered, as if through Time having let so many of his baby years cut their teeth on it.

As for the High Mills themselves, they reflected, as mills will do, the fortunes of their master. The white one wanted but a background of snowy clouds to render its soiled chalky hue positively ghastly. The black mill had changed its state of slow decay to one of such rapid ruin, that poor Ambray could half suspect it of making suicidal attacks on itself in the night; or of being the victim of some furious Quixote, for whose tracks across the barley the miller looked with half suspicious eyes, as he came forth yawning wearily in the face of the rising sun.

All the year he had worked harder than he had ever done in his life. After the prostration that had made his days all like one long dark dream for weeks after Michael's trial, there had come with returning strength a passionate desire to hide his feebleness and his broken heart from the world which he considered to have used him so cruelly. It should see, he told himself, whether or not his boy's mother had need to depend on the "unpunished" murderer for her daily bread. It should see that *he* at least was not crushed to the earth with shame at the fall of his idol. He would show it that he gloried still in his son's memory—that no revelations had yet, nor ever could, lessen his love for him or lay low his pride.

In the winter evenings he had sat with the Bible that had belonged to his great-grandfather open before him—not seeking in it any comfort, but only gazing at the beloved name—the last of the long list on each of the two pages recording births and deaths; and dreaming of the time when scornful eyes should see the sabbath sun shine in upon that name on the church wall just over where its owner used to bend or lift in prayer or song his careless comely face.

The "nest egg" of the store for this cherished purpose was taken from the first money that came into his hand after the trial, and was hidden in the mill where none but himself could find it. It would not do to tell Esther. He might fall ill, and she would at need take it for his comfort.

He had in truth almost ceased talking to her about George; he thought her grief was too soon lost in care for himself; and he

was embittered against her for this, though he took all her care as his due. Yet there were times when he would almost exult in the thought that he *only*—the father to whom George had cried out at his death—he *only* loved him still beyond all things. He was eager to cherish his own joyless life that the young man's name might not yet die out of the world, "for when I am in the grave," he said, "who will speak well of him? The mother who bore him forgets him; the woman who was nearly his wife is already comforted and again happy; his friends who led him astray—of them, who hears anything?—while as for *me*, my very food and drink is still to me as his funeral cake and wine—I drink to him, I eat to him, I get up in the morning and force my limbs and pains into my clothes, and work and win my daily bread that his only mourner may remain yet a little longer in the world, in case that out of heaven, or worse still, out of hell, my boy should look back and see himself forgotten—so soon—so soon."

Therefore, the great mill-sails laboured round for George, lying a stranger in the churchyard at Thames Dutton, as they had laboured round for him when he sat a little flaxen-headed child clapping his hands at them; the difference being that then a broad ruddy face would often come to the mill-window and look down with fondly concealed love and pride, while *now* a white face would come there and look up with eyes on whose bitter waters the same love and pride, all wounded as they were, rode boldly still, like two defiant war-maimed ships upon a troubled sea.

People thought all the first half of the year how well the old man bore himself in his bereavement, how steadily he worked, how little he complained of his ailments to what he used to do. But in time a change came over him. Instead of rising in the morning immediately he woke, and seizing on his clothes with trembling, resolute fingers, he would sit up and stare at the light, then fall back on his pillow, letting the cold, sluggish tears creep from his unwincing eyes. The *comfort* which his own devotion to his son's memory had given him was beginning to leave him, though the devotion itself did not change. The idea of living and working on purpose to honour George's name was one which time robbed of its tenderness and tangibility. Recollection began to fail; the beloved image grew faint, so faint; the eyes of his soul ached with straining (to see it); it was dying from him—he was being left alone;

he had been almost content to live for the sake of a shade—a spectre—that he thought at least would be with him always; and now that was vanishing; the very echo of the voice he had so loved was growing silent—the faint sweetness of the fallen rose was leaving the dead leaves, passionately as he tried to retain it. He could scarcely now remember things about his son which Esther had thought it impossible for him to forget; and whenever he discovered this to be the case he suffered frightfully. He showed unwonted gratitude when his wife recalled to his memory things about George concerning which he was confused in this manner—

“Thank you, Esther,” he would say, laying his shaking hand on hers; “thank you—yes, you’re right. Oh! I remember now; don’t let me forget that again, Esther; don’t, for God’s sake, let me forget it again.”

Finding as he did the grave’s victory growing greater every day—hearing as he did only a deeper silence each time his soul listened and knocked at those doors of awful mystery that had closed on all he loved—he sat down and contemplated the black, sunless world aghast and helpless like a child left in the dark.

He could not work; but for his wife’s toil both might have starved. He was furious at the thought of help from Nora, whom he charged with utter falsity and fickleness because she did not die, or continue to wear mourning for George. Neither would he knowingly receive anything beyond what he considered his due from Mrs. Grist, who had refused to help him in the prosecution of Michael.

He did not mind the thought of starving himself—as for his wife he did not think about her. Sometimes when his breath left him in a fit of coughing, he hoped it might never come back again. If his foot slipped on the mill-steps he regretted he had not fallen and been killed. He wooed death, and found it, as its wooers generally do, the bitterest of coquettes.

The only star that ever shone for him in all the blackness of life was a lurid and baleful one enough. It was the thought of Michael, of some possible revenge, and the darker his life grew the more this attracted and charmed him; though it was so far off as to cause him to gnash his teeth and moan at it, like a madman through the bars of his cage at the unreachable object for which he wishes.

The goodness that had attached itself to Michael’s name at the trial was now the chief

theme of Ambray’s thoughts—memory in losing its grasp of George became strong in its hold on Michael—not one good trait in his character was forgotten, or ever failed in being thought over to feed and nourish the hatred which was now as strong a passion as the old man’s grief.

He mentioned his name to no one. None guessed the thoughts with which he beguiled the long hours as he sat in the house before his fireless grate, or out in the sun under the motionless mills.

Old Esther, looking up from her work at him, would shed many a tear for the faithful servant he had lost: Once, when Ambray sat with his long face framed in his bony fingers staring at the still sails with their coverings wrapt about them in shroud-like fashion, his wife said to him with tears—

“Ah, John, what would you give to see ’em going round again, and hear that Michael clamping up and down the stairs with his great gruff voice singing his ‘*Heigh, Will! and ho, Will! whistle for a breeze!*’—or his great easy figure lolling there in the doorway?”

Ambray dropped his hands from his face and gazed up at her as she stood beside him. It was clear he realised the picture vividly. Then he got up and walked round the mill several times, looking up at it often, and was unusually excited all the rest of the day.

It was just before the hop season that Esther one morning, while waiting upon her husband, suddenly fell down, and lay at his feet, supporting herself on her elbow, and gasping faintly.

“Why, what’s the matter now?” asked Ambray, recoiling, with the bandage that she had been binding round his rheumatic arm hanging half off; “What’s the matter with the woman now?”

“O dear!” moaned Esther faintly. “I’m afraid, John, I’ve gone too low.”

“Too low!” repeated Ambray. “Yes, I should think you had. I want to know what you’ve gone so low for?”

“O dear! I’m afraid, John—don’t worry yourself—but I’m afraid it’s for want of food.”

“For want of food!” echoed the miller, putting his hand to his forehead and looking down at her in feeble perplexity. “Why, how’s that, Esther? You’re dreaming, woman. If it was that—I should be bad too. I’m not hungry. I’ve had enough.”

Esther smiled as her elbow gave way, and her cheek touched the brick floor.

“Yes, dear,” she said, “that’s it. You’ve

had it *all* these two days. God bless you!"

It was this little scene that had led to M'ar S'one's good heart being pained by the sight of the old couple coming to ask his mistress to allow them to join in the hop-picking.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MRS. GRIST'S hop-picking lasted just a fortnight.

During this season nearly all Southdownshire seems to abandon itself to a kind of hop idolatry. The small village shops are mostly open only for an hour early in the morning, and then closed till dusk, and any chance customers seeking admittance are told from some upper window or neighbouring door that its owner "bees gone a-hoppin'," the informant being generally a cripple, or too aged a person to go a-hopping likewise.

As early as five o'clock in the morning one may see on the high parts of the roads, or hear in the misty hollows, the family parties proceeding in their carts with dangling kettles and sleepy children to the different hop gardens. Scarcely a child is to be met without hops in its hat or a paper of the worms they call "hop-dogs" in its hands. The cottage chimneys are smokeless all day, the hardy monthly roses—Southdownshire's autumn glory—vivid scentless scarlet and sweet pink—open and beat themselves to death unnoticed on the latticed windows and still doors. While one looks and wonders at the stillness and desertion, the very sparrows on the thatch-edge seem trying to explain its cause, to express in dumb show the fact that the inmates are "gone a-hopping."

Most of the gardens seem strangely out of the way and secluded, but whether through the trees having begun to thin, or whether the eye at this season naturally looks for them, the oast houses certainly have a prominence and importance in the landscape they never had before throughout the year. Perhaps the faint odours of the hops themselves issuing from these is after all the true reason of this. Whatever it may be, there they are, consequential, and looking like an old woman shawled and bonneted for some important mission.

The last day of Mrs. Grist's hopping was as fine as the first; but some heavy rain intervening, had given what Ambray called a "sharp edge" to his cough, and he had much difficulty in keeping to his task through the day.

In the afternoon, when the pickers divided into little tea parties, he and Esther sat alone, just outside the poles, to eat their bread and drink their bottle of cold tea that they might be refreshed for the last two hours of picking.

On one side of them the incessant gossip went on, at the other a little stream of water trickled cheerily down the hill.

Ambray sat staring into this water as he ate, his face averted from the poles. Esther's eyes were fixed on him, though she inclined her ear a little to catch the bit of news and the gossip which while she had life must needs have interest for her.

Ambray had noticed this, and was letting contempt for woman's frivolity and weakness swell the bitterness that already filled his soul without being conscious that he was himself listening, the difference being that *his* ears received the men's remarks only, while Esther's heard but the shriller voices of her own sex.

If both had remembered and repeated what they listened to, as they paused after their meal, before getting up, they would have given each a totally different account from the other.

Esther's would have been this,—

"I want a frock fur little Ann; be wilit fash'nerbul, think you?"

"Well, *I* bees goin' to have brown meriny for *my* two gals."

"Bees you! well you do s'prise me. But now I want somethin' downright oncommon fur 'ur. Set up, miss, and leave aarf throwin' th'y 'op dogs in my tea, will you! See she's a goo'n to school next week, and there's sich mischief as never wur if a child fin's itself worse dressed than the others, so I want fur 'ur to have somethin' reel fash'nerbul an' good—like what none o' the rest—they Moon's child'n and arl them caant get. I thart a nice wilit!"

"I'm s'prised now as you fancies wilit. Your 'usband's sister's got one."

"Noo!"

"She bees."

"Who telled you?"

"Jane—she wur pickin' down at Leweses, side o' old Mary Vidler."

"O my 'ert! *I* bees glad you telled me, naasty mischief-maakin' thing; *I* bees sick of her naame! My 'usband's just been over theer, and caant tark o' nothing else. Noo *I* won't have a wilit if *I* know it."

"Movver, *I* wants a wilit. You said *I*'d hev a wilit if you picked a bin."

"Then you won't hev it, miss. You put that theer doll's 'ead in that tea-pot agin!"

Likely I'll pick a bin or aarf a bin wi' you to mind. She's ben a'rl set on woilit 'cause she see Miss Ambrey in one yest'y."

"Not down at her aunt's, sure? I wur telled she wouldn't speak to her agin."

"Who telled you that?"

"Orrey Moon heered it up at Stone Crouch, pickin' side o' Betsy's brother."

At the time Esther took sad heed of this, Ambray was listening unconsciously to the talk of the husbands in the same group.

"So old G'ist's taught that farm o' Ray's. Know wut she's gev fo' it?"

"Noo—nat more'n's worth, I lay."

"Don't think much o' the land up that end myself. Be she go'n to plough that theer holler, or fence it aurf?"

"I caant tell you. Ma'r S'one, be your missis go'n to fence aurf that holler up at thet field or to plough it?"

"She hev'n't quite made up her mind yet, Missis hev'n't—not 'bout that holler."

"She art to plough it, Ma'r S'one."

"It 'ud be good fur her to plough it, sir; I 'grees to that; it's the best corn as grows in th' holler—so 'tis, sure."

"Nonsense, Ma'r S'one; you persuade her to fence it aarf."

"Or it 'ud be very handy, fenced aarf; so 'twould sir, sure."

"I was told corn never didn't, nor never wouldn't grow, not in theer holler."

"Who telled you that?"

"Why I wur pickin' side o' Tom laarst week, and he said your faather-in-la said so."

"Waugh! My faather-in-la! Old idjut! Lot he knows, 'cept to set the wemmen jawin' at ye. 'Cause he's a gardener, and potters 'bout his bit o' ground a'rl day, there's my wife at me everlastin' 'bout our bit; it's 'faather has paarsley a'rl the year round,' or 'faather' this, or 'faather' that. Ugh! he said so, did he? Then a'rl the more fur that I say, G'ist's a fool if she don't plough that holler."

Doubtless, if the hearing had been reversed—if Esther had listened to the gruff guttural tones and Ambray to the shrill ones—both would have found the logic they heard defective. As it was, it of course appeared perfectly natural. But what far-away, unreal things these that the pickers talked of seemed to both! They sat outside the garden and all its worldly interests like two children who in the great game of life had been quarrelled with and ordered to stop playing. Lonely and sad and inexpressibly weary, they waited to be taken by

the hand from the road whose dust *was* dust to them, never again to be made into playthings and imaginary viands; the mud-pies which had cost so much labour in making were irrevocably mud again; they had dropped them from their hands, and now watched their companions still making them with dull and dreamy interest, half envious, half pitying.

The sweet-voiced water in the ravine beside them, though incomprehensible in what it uttered as the talk of grown people to infants, seemed to have a meaning, a comfort, a reliableness deeper than the human voices on the other side of them. So had that of the little air-sailor, the skylark, letting itself up and down in its har-mock of song: so had the wind, creeping through the woods like music through a ball-room, and setting the autumnal brocades of gold and green and brown all richly rustling.

Nature's face was sweet as her voice at that hour: the aged eyes looked up into the golden clearness, and closed in pain. Her smile fell upon them, but was not for them. It was as if it had cast them off before death was ready to take them. They seemed waiting in some intermediate stage in which the miseries of both had access to their souls.

Ambray beheld in the lovely scene before them the house where he was born, whose doors and stairs the hopes and dreams of his wakefulness and his slumber had never ceased to haunt. These had not been selfish dreams—they had sprung from all the better part of his nature, and he knew this, and mused over their destruction, and upon the God whom he charged with destroying them, with a doubt and sarcasm of spirit that appalled himself even while he could not put it from him. If his life and losses were part of a divine plan, what a cruel plan it was that these things should be necessary! How could it benefit God for Him first to fill those windows with the sweet vision of George's children, and then to wash it out with George's blood, so that now those windows, glittering in the sun, had as tragic a look to him as beloved eyes whose joy had suddenly been turned into horror?

He withdrew his gaze from them shudderingly, and looked down upon the running water.

He heard the voice of her who had usurped his place in his father's house and lands speaking in vulgar dictatorial tones to the hop-pickers in that very garden where she, a shoeless, ragged tramp, had pleased his

brother's easily attracted eye. Was *this*, too, part of the divine plan men talked of, for grey hairs to be thus abased to the earth while still the earth refused to cover them?

Mrs. Grist approached, her silk dress rustling harshly against the hop-poles.

Ambray set up his shoulders and lowered his head.

"Well, John Ambray, how are *you* getting on? M'ar S'one tells me you're doing wonderful. How are you, Esther? you don't look over well; but, la! we can't expect to be young always—can we? I'm thankful for ahl of us as we've had a fine finish-up day. I shall pay up o' Friday. Good evening, I must go and find M'ar S'one."

She went rustling away, leaving Ambray's head lower than ever on his shoulders, and his lips parted in a bitter smile as he looked into the water.

Most of the pickers were rising and resuming their tasks. A little group, nearest the miller and his wife, began a wild, rhapsodical Methodist hymn. An old woman cried out to Esther through the poles:

"Come, Esther, you arlwis used to beat us arl. Sing a bit, woman, it'll do ye good."

Esther, who had been looking wistfully towards the singers, at this turned her sorrowful old face proudly away.

Her husband, still bending over the rivulet, had heard the invitation, and interpreted the bitterness of her silence. He held his hand out to her, without looking up, and as she took it, closed his shaking fingers over hers, saying or almost groaning,—

"By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept."

At this the cup, so full already, overflowed. Esther dashed her apron up to her eyes, and for the next few minutes Ambray's bony fingers covered all his face.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE whole of Mrs. Grist's hops were safely picked before sunset, and Ambray and Esther went home while the light was still golden and warm along the road.

At those who passed them by, guessing what their earnings would come to, according to Ma'r S'one's measuring, and talking of the ways in which they should be spent, the haggard old eyes looked as they might have done at creatures of another world.

To the aged poor of Southdownshire these last days of hop-picking are mostly sad enough in the retrospection that they compel. The young voices around them declaring they will not be content without the greatest prize

that a hop-picker can win, reminds them how they also made the same boast, how year by year both hope and realisation have dwindled, till at last they are glad to earn a warm garment to cover them, a little tobacco or snuff to deaden the sharp reality of the long winter hours, a penny or two, to win the services of grandchildren strong and careless, or the smile of great-grandchildren, helpless and as yet innocent of worldly hopes as themselves.

The memory of their own youth and its hopes stole over Ambray and Esther with the faint narcotic odours of the drying hops from the oast houses, and made their feeble steps and breathing more feeble still, as, leaning on each other, they toiled up towards the High Mills.

The white lane was hot and wearisome at this hour, and the south wind did nothing but blow the dust, which flew into the eyes of the old miller and his wife, and encircled their stooping forms so as to cause Ambray to smile bitterly, and mutter, as Esther murmured at it on his account,

"Why should it stand on ceremony with what will so soon belong to it? It comes for us, as we won't go to it."

This dust and the heat, the quick cloud of gnats before their eyes, and the steepness of the road made them oblivious of a sound and light which otherwise must have much sooner attracted their attention. As it was they had passed the spot where Michael first saw the white tip of the mill-sail flash up against the sky before Esther happened to raise her eyes. When she did so, she started back crying,

"Oh, my heart! John, the mill's going!"

The miller strained his eyes passionately through dust, gnats, and sun; then caught his wife's arm with both hands, and looked into her face.

"Esther," he said, in a quick whisper, "has she done it at last? Has she taken them from us? Has she put some one in it, Esther?"

"No, no; nonsense," answered Mrs. Ambray, trying to keep herself from shaking; "it's those boys again, John. Of course it is."

"Rascals!" ejaculated the miller, with a strange mixture of relief and anger. "Yes, of course it must be them. I'll teach 'em—but—but, Esther, they've set it right for the wind; those rascals never got it just right like that. Oh! if she has, Esther!"

"It's the boys, John, it's the boys," said Esther reassuringly. "They'll make off as soon as they see us. Let's hurry up; don't stand here frightening yourself like this. Come."

They pressed on together, each supporting arm trying to conceal its trembling from the other.

Ambray stood still as they reached the mill-field.

He had no voice, but as he turned to Esther shaking his head and moving his lips she understood him to say—

"It's not the boys. She has done it. She has put some one in."

After this he strode on before her towards the mill, and did not stop till he stood close under it. He paused before the half-open door listening without making any movement to enter. Then he walked round looking up at all the windows.

As he again met Esther at the door he said with the calmness of utter despair—

"If she's let it—if she's put any one into it, I shall burn it, Esther. I shall burn it to the ground."

He had not finished speaking before Esther's hand caught his and held it against her heart, and looking at her face, he saw it raised towards the mill with colour coming on its white cheeks, tears brimming and softening the eyes, hope parting the thin lips.

"John," said she, "as I'm a living woman I think——"

"What! what!" gasped Ambray, shaking her arm and turning his back on the mill that he might keep off a sound, a sense he was beginning faintly to perceive. "What, Esther, what?"

"Yes!" cried Esther joyfully, pushing past him and standing by the mill-door with both hands caught back almost to her shoulders, and her head bent and inclined to one side in the eagerness with which she listened. "Yes, yes! It is! It is!" she cried, bringing her hands one over the other on her side.

"What, woman, what?"

"It's Michael Swift's voice and step as sure as my old heart's a-beating!"

The miller crept up to her and stood between her and the open door, listening and fixing his eyes on her face as if looking for it to assist by its expression his feebler senses.

Standing thus they both heard the run of unmistakable feet down one of the upper ladders, and the deep honest roll of an unmistakable voice rising and sinking with the noise of the stone and sails,—

"Heigh, Will! and ho, Will!
Whistle for a breeze.
Run, Will, turn the mill,
Set it to the seas."

The little bell up over the grindstone

tinkled, it was answered by a shout half cheery, half grumbling, just such as Michael used to answer it with to Ambray's grim amusement in the old days, then the feet went clamping up higher and higher, and when the voice was next heard it came from the tiny square window of the shooting floor.

Ambray let out his suspended breath, crept a few steps further away from the mill, then looked up at this window pressing both hands on his throat as if to hold in his cough, which was shaking him. Mrs. Ambray followed and stood at his side, holding up her finger and leaning forwards to watch his face with such a smile on her own as had not lit its wan features for many years.

The great shadow of the sails swept round at their feet as the voice rolled out with the immemorial mill tune, to which every miller has his own words, imitating in alternate lines the peculiar "thump-thump" of the sails and their soft prolonged rush.

"Day breaks, the breeze wakes,"
Bless it every mouth!
Run, Will, turn the mill,
Set it to the south."

Mrs. Ambray in her excitement had moved her hand tremblingly in time to the song. Ambray seeing this had seized her wrist, and held it down with a grasp like iron.

Then they heard the steps and the voice lower in the mill—the noise of the door opening on the little terrace. Ambray's breath came quicker; his pressure against his own throat and on Esther's hand tightened.

The well-known figure stood in the little doorway in an attitude so familiar to the eyes watching it, that it seemed as if all must be a dream since the day it stood there last.

How many times the miller and his wife had seen it looking exactly as it did now, leaning against one side the door in an utter abandonment to rest and ease, the back of the hand laid across the forehead, pushing off the cap, the black eyes looking right away over Buckholt fields, never wincing as the tips of the sails flashed round before them, but gazing on dreamily while the same mysterious words which nobody could ever understand came rolling out, as they did now:—

"Hi, Will! say why, Will,
You, when *she* comes forth,
Find, Will, the wind, Will,
At-ways in the north."

Ambray, looking round at the aspect of the land, and smelling the hops in the breeze, remembered that the story of his son's death was no dream. Michael had never been here so late in the year. It was all true enough. He and Esther had picked Mrs. Grist's hops—this was the last day—they had come home

—had seen the sails moving—this man was Michael Swift; Michael Swift had come back to the High Mills.

He watched him shut the little door, and listened to his feet coming lower till he heard the sound of his step half smothered by the dust on the ground-floor.

Ambray turned his eyes to the half-open door. As he did so it was pushed quite open. Michael's eyes met his.

At that moment Mrs. Ambray ran to Michael and clutched at his shoulder, looking in his face and shaking her head in speechless emotion.

Ambray seemed surprised at this, for he gave a sigh of horror, and retreated a few steps while watching them intently.

Michael looked at him, scarcely heeding Mrs. Ambray's clinging hands and eloquent face.

He was very pale; his face looked smaller, his eyes larger, Ambray thought, his clothes hung upon him loosely.

"My son," said Mrs. Ambray, "do you mock us, my son? Where are you bound for, and why do you come here, setting the old mill going, and making us remember what you were to us? How have you the heart to do this, Michael Swift?"

Ambray, with his eyes still upon Michael, seemed so lost in curiosity as to what his answer would be, he forgot to keep any control over his face.

Michael, still apparently ignoring Mrs. Ambray's presence, spoke to him in the manner and voice of one making the simplest matter-of-fact statement, though his eyes were full of suffering and his lips white.

"My time is up," he said. "You have had the law upon me. I have come again. Why not? Your son bought you my services, *he* gives them to you—not I. You need them. They are yours. There is nothing to pay for them, not even forgiveness if you still choose to hold it back."

Ambray looked at him still, weighing every word.

His first thought when he understood all Michael had said was how he should conceal his own increasing excitement. It was almost more than he could bear, the idea of having this unlooked-for change in his life—of having constantly before his eyes—in his service, in his power—the only object of interest the world contained for him.

He looked at Michael, wishing he could speak the words necessary to decide his staying. He trembled lest in his inability to do this he might lose him.

"By all that's good in this wicked world," sobbed Mrs. Ambray, "the Lord will repay you, Michael. He surely will. When were you out of prison? How long have you been in the mill? What have you had? Near starving, I dare say. Come—come home."

For once in her life Esther, in her delight and enthusiasm over Michael, showed a defiant disregard of Ambray, never looking at him as she tried to draw Michael homewards.

But Michael gently broke from her, and went nearer to the old man.

"What do you say, master?" he asked. "You have had the law upon me as you wished. *That* is over. I have come to go on keeping my promise to George. Do you forbid me?"

At these words the miller approached a step nearer, his white face became more excited, and he shook his head with peculiar emphasis.

Michael's heart failed him.

"You do *not* forbid me then," he asked, "to come here and work for you again?"

Ambray shook his head even more emphatically, then turned and signed to Esther for her arm, and began to hasten homewards.

Michael stood for a moment, rendered motionless and cold as death by the deep and terrifying mystery of Ambray's expression. Seeing, however, that Esther looked back for him affectionately and anxiously, he roused himself and followed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE old life began again.

For a whole week Ambray was absorbed by his efforts to realise Michael's presence. When Michael was in the mill he scarcely removed his eyes from it, when Michael sat in George's old place in the chimney corner, where Mrs. Ambray always insisted on placing him, he never looked towards the miller but he encountered the fixed, furtive gaze of that terrible eye.

When Ambray had really learnt to regard his return as a certainty, he gave himself up to long fits of morbid reflection as to how—weak and helpless as he was—the work of punishment might be begun.

He had no desire to fire the mill when he saw Michael's light there in the night. He could sit near Michael with knives on the table between them without the slightest wish to take one up for any terrible purpose; he could sit with his loaded gun in his hands, watching for the mill rats hours together, and

let Michael pass and repass him securely a hundred times. It was not his life he had any wish to strike at. He knew that a life such as his was a complete and a good thing—a triumph—end when and how it might. What he *did* desire with all the strength that remained to him was to see that spirit—in whose brightness and good odour George's had shown so vile and dull before the world—defiled, brought low, maimed, annihilated.

His having returned to the High Mills now—showing that his patience and devotion had

triumphed over prison miseries—was in itself a new theme for hatred and wrath to Ambray, glad as he was of the return, which had come to be his first recollection at morning, his last thought at night.

A new thing, too, which he noticed in Michael since his imprisonment, moved in him at once his whole heart's interest, commendation, and intensest bitterness. This was the simple and strong manner in which Michael kept his mind and heart free from the sad influences of the past. He evidently,



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the miller thought, regarded his error as a thing already atoned for—forgiven by God. Life, so dark to *him* by reason of so much of its light being shut away under one little lid, was still full of promise and sunshine for Michael, whose hand had caused this shutting away. He never now saw the dark eyes turn sick and confused when they encountered his look, as they had done so often in those days when George's fate was his own fearful secret; their look still was gentle enough, but fearless as the light. Without desisting from his hard work, Michael enjoyed life as much as he could in a place where he was still regarded

as little better than a murderer. Not that the inhabitants of Lamberhurst were particularly unjust or hard-hearted, but because a village idea—like a village fever—having once become settled is not easily removed.

When Michael had to pass groups of distrustful and disliking faces, he did so with a half amused, half pitying look in his much-worn but still glad great eyes. When little children, taking the cue from their elders, lay down and kicked and screamed after he had tossed them in the air, or threatened to send them up with the sails, instead of being hurt in his good heart, he laughed till the old

millar would come hobbling out to glare at him.

It was in search of some means of smiting down this bright hopefulness, independence, and courage that Ambray brooded through the shortening autumn days and lengthening autumn nights.

The year wore on.

The dead bind was picked from the hop-pole, and lay in little black heaps at regular distances between the pole stacks. The berries and the robins' breasts brightened to vivid scarlet in the hedges which lay across the country now—long streaks of warm, rich colour. In the woods, too, the red stood thick, like blood settled at the surface in aged cheeks. The silver hoar-frost came, only visible a moment or two at morning, then snatched away like a forgotten garment of the night. The white hoar-frosts came, lingering hours later, striving with the sun till nearly noon for possession of each rustling leaf and tender blade of grass.

These changes were watched by the old miller with a bitterness indescribable. Would the winter come, he asked himself, and chain him to his bed—as it usually did—while this fearful thirst in his soul was still unsatisfied? If this went on much longer, *would* the mill be safe from fire, the knife lie harmless on the table, or the gun in his hands?

But the day did come at last when the coveted power was given him.

Michael, through a kindly act in a corner of the village where fever was raging, fell ill himself, and lay for five weeks in the old black mill which Ma'r S'one, who was his only nurse, had made habitable for him.

When he came out and resumed his work, he was much changed: his cheerfulness was gone, and he was quick to take offence, and peevish as a child.

Ambray now quietly exulted. Michael fell completely into his power. No swine-herd was ever treated with more contumely. Every little duty that fell to his hand was embittered by puerile opposition and abuse; every step he took, every word he uttered, was laid wait for by the same furtive, sleepless tyranny.

The healthful mind was brought so low, it retained now but one idea, which only became the more firmly rooted as the work of ruin went on. This idea was that duty compelled him to stay where he was; then as he grew weaker, it was no longer only duty, but fate also. He felt he had it not in his power to go.

He was now reduced to such weakness of body and mind, that when he saw Ambray thrust his letters from home unopened into the fire, he could only stare through his swimming eyes and gnaw his lip in helpless sickness of soul. The miller prevented him also in all his feeble efforts at writing to his family, and delighted in the idea of their looking vainly for his letters as Michael had so long allowed him to look vainly for George's.

Mrs. Ambray did all she could to comfort Michael in these innumerable mortifications and sufferings, but the state of him by whom they were rendered filled her with such terror and anguish, that her whole time was occupied in watching and serving him, and in fruitless endeavours to induce his spirit to let go its fierce grip of this harmless and helpless creature. But it seemed as if nothing save death *could* ever loosen it.

Michael's sufferings deepened with the winter. Ambray kept all his clothes from him but one thin summer mill-suit, in which he went about shivering so that his teeth chattered, and he became an object of pity and commiseration to all the village. The boys only, with that innate cruelty which makes human nature so terrifying a mystery, found untiring amusement in adding to his torture; and Michael had come to such a pass as to weep like a child when they placed things in his way by which he received painful falls, or when they injured the machinery of the mill, or threw stones at the windows.

Ambray seemed to have received a new lease of life from this excitement. It kept him from his usual winter prostration. He had now no other thought than going on with this work of retribution as long as he might. He foresaw that it must be brought to an end some day. Already people were interfering. Two or three clergymen whom Ambray had known and respected in his better days, General Milwood, who had fought with his father at Waterloo, and even Mrs. Grist herself, "for the credit of the family," had been up to the High Mills to remonstrate with the feeble but bitter tyrant there.

At last Nora came. She had been abroad with Miss Milwood, and had but lately come back and heard of Michael's return, his illness, and Ambray's treatment of him.

It was on a cold afternoon that she came, when the sails went harshly round in the east wind, and Michael stood leaning at the mill-door with closed eyes, and breathing on his icy fingers.

Ambray sat at home, cowering over the

fire, and put up his shoulders and let his chin fall as he heard her horse's feet coming.

In another moment she stood before him, declaring her pity for Michael, and calling upon her uncle to put an end to these shameful stories, that met her wherever she went.

As she ceased speaking, Ambray looked up at her and his face softened. Bitterly as he spoke of her in her absence, he could never see her without a certain tenderness and the sense of a different and gentler grief, that fell upon his own hard sorrow like soft rain on frozen ground. He never looked at her but his regret that George should have lost her came upon him as a fresh thing. It did so now, and the thin, white old face smiled at her and wept, forgetting her appeal.

"He has not even heard," she sighed, looking away impatiently.

"Yes, Nora," said the miller, "I hear you; and I see you—fresh roses, bright eyes, gay, cold heart!"

"Gay!" echoed Nora, taking off her gloves and warming her hands at the fire: "What I have to bear from Aunt Jane, and what I have to bear from you, keeps my heart very gay, certainly! But if you hear me, uncle, will you think of what I have said? Will you send this man away if you cannot overcome your feelings against him? He will not go, they tell me, unless you *do* send him. Will you do so, and stop *this* trouble and disgrace—this wickedness?"

"My child," answered Ambray, taking her hands as she held them to the fire, and looking down at them tenderly—"do you dare to judge me. *Let the faithful judge the faithful.* Go—the world has many lovers for Nora—but—no son for me! Remember this, Nora, and do not judge me."

"This man would be a son to you if you would let him," said Nora. "Why, what a miracle of patience he is, if what I've heard is true! It seems to me he is either an idiot or—he is grand!"

"Go," muttered the miller, dropping her hands, and shrinking down again, as if he had received a blow. "Leave me, Nora, you do no good—you do harm—leave me alone."

"I will!" answered Nora, indignantly; "and I will persuade Michael Swift to leave you. I will go to the mill myself, and try to shew him his folly in being faithful to you. *Let the faithful serve the faithful.*"

She went out, and the miller hearing the door close after her, roused himself and looked round.

When he had made sure she was gone, he

muttered, stooping low and gazing into the fire,

"He is either an idiot or—he is grand."

He drew back from the fire suddenly, saying, with quiet decision:

"He is not an idiot."

He stood up—holding one trembling hand clenched tightly in the other—

"Is he then—grand?"

At this moment, as Esther came in, he met her, and seizing her arms cried—

"What am I doing, Esther? what am I doing? Making a young Job of him? A martyr! To draw *her* eyes upon him! Is *this* my revenge? He's taken the boy's life—his good name—his mother's love"—he cried, shaking her savagely—"and now—now could it be possible! No, I am mad to think it—mad! Yet, Esther! You should—oh! you should have seen her eyes when she flashed 'em upon me and said, '*or—he is grand!*' She has gone to the mill to speak to him. I will follow her—give me my hat—I will follow her."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NORA, on her way homeward, rode round by the mill, and stopped at the door. It was partly open, and she rode close up to it and knocked with her whip, and called Michael by name.

Almost directly the door was opened wide; but the ground-floor of the mill being somewhat dark, Nora did not recognise the person who had opened it.

"Is Michael Swift here?" she asked leaning a little forward.

The person appeared deaf, for he did not answer her.

"Michael Swift," repeated Nora, in a louder voice—"is he here?"

"I knew a *man* by that name once," answered a voice that sent a chill through her blood. "*Now, I* bear it."

He stood a little more in the light—she saw him plainly. All the pathos of the wasted strength, the patient misery, the baffled but still heroic strength of purpose, came over her at once out of those great hollow eyes, and she had to turn her face hastily away.

When she spoke, all her decision and vehemence were gone. She was surprised at the timidity and trembling of her voice.

"Why do you stay here?" she said.

"To grind it out."

"It is ground out."

"I thank God that I hear you say it."

"Be content, then, and go."

"I cannot do that ; I must wait till I hear *him* say it too."

"You will never do that. He would never say it, never think it, unless his whole nature changed, and he is too old to change."

"Yes," answered Michael, in a low voice, full of patient despair, "I think so, too. He is too old to change."

"Then why wait here?"

"I must wait—I must serve him while he lives—or while *I* live."

Nora was silent. She could not think what possessed her that she had suddenly lost all power to oppose him. The old mill seemed to have assumed the dignity of a castle ; the wasted, half-imbecile wretch she had heard so much of was causing her to hold down her head meekly before the doorway where he stood.

"Then you will stay?" she said at last, almost humbly.

"Yes."

"Can I not assist you in any way?—you will take no money. Is there nothing by which we may make your life less hard?"

"Thank you—God bless you—no ; nothing more."

"More! why I have given you *nothing*, done nothing for you."

"May I tell you about a picture George had at our house?"

"What about it?"

"It was the picture of a ship."

"Yes," said Nora, hearing that his voice trembled.

"Yes ; it was the ship of some great man, I cannot tell you who ; but he had had some great victory, and those that he had taken captives were being lashed as they were in the galley, with their muscles straining ready to snap, and their eyes starting, and hands bleeding, while up above on the deck the conqueror feasted among ladies crowned with flowers. There was one lady, with her face so turned that her eyes fell on the face of one of the straining galley-slaves ; but she did not know where she looked ; but *he* did, and you could see he half forgot his slavery, his toil and pain under her look."

"Well?"

"This is all the picture—but—but I wished to tell you of it that I might ask you to think how, if the galley slave forgot his pain under *this* look quite cold and heedless, how he would have felt if he had seen the eyes run over with such—such pity, such sweetness, kindness, gentle pain, and—what! Tears too? Oh! go back then, *my* lady, go back to your feasting and music and merry-making,

let the muscles crack, the blood pour down, the galley slave is happy. He can work until he drops under the lash!"

He ran into the mill, and Nora rode home half blind.

CHAPTER XL.

It was a month after Nora's visit that one morning Michael, on his way to the mill, heard the bell tolling.

Mrs. Grist had died suddenly in the night.

Michael did not think the news would greatly affect his master, as he knew him to be far more reluctant to accept help from Nora than from his sister-in-law. He was therefore much surprised when on returning to the miller's cottage at noon Mrs. Ambray met him outside the gate with gestures of caution and distress.

"Don't go near him just now, Michael," she whispered ; "he would fly at you, he has only just heard."

"What?" asked Michael. "That she's dead?"

"Oh! my son, don't you know what has happened since, Michael? My poor John has come into his own—we are rich, Michael."

"My God!" cried out Michael, letting his face fall to her shoulder with a great sob. "Then I am free—I can go home!"

"You *are* free, you *can* go home, if you will when I have told you all.—Come here."

She drew him to the side of the parlour window and pointed for him to look in at it cautiously.

Michael did so, and saw a sight he never forgot. It was only the old miller sitting at a table by himself, laughing to himself, but it was the most terrible sight Michael had ever looked upon.

"How long has this been?" he asked, dragging Mrs. Ambray away.

Then she told him how long she had kept her fearful secret—some three weeks now—and throwing herself at his feet implored him by all his long patience, by her affection for him, by his heavy responsibility as George's destroyer, to stay with his master still, and help her to conceal his infirmity from the world, lest they should drag him to the mad-house.

Michael gave his promise.

CHAPTER XL.

MRS. GRIST had taken leave of her farms, hop-gardens, mills, church-tithes, and all her other good things of this world some four months, when, one morning, two pale convalescents, a young man, and an old man,

were led out of doors to sit in the May sunshine.

The young man was on the green at Thames Dutton, the old man outside Buckholt farmhouse in Lamberhurst.

The black mill was now a strange sight indeed, having been laid open to its centre by fire.

The invalid at Thames Dutton had his arm in a sling; the one at Buckholt held his Bible open at the list of family names with hands that were covered with burns.

The injuries of both and those of the black mill had but one story.

"What *can* he be thinking of, Ma'r S'one, so many hours?" said Mrs. Ambray, as they both stood watching the old miller, who sat in the sunshine with his eyes fixed on the ground. "The doctor told me again this morning, that as he had been right ever since the shock that brought him to his right mind, he is almost certain to keep right with quiet, and comforts such as, thank God, he has in plenty. But what *can* he think about so long I can't imagine."

Neither could Ma'r S'one, had he been presumptuous enough to try.

"What's Tom put Michael right in the sun for like that?" demanded old Swift angrily. "Go and wheel him a little into the shade, Henry."

"There now, you've put him just where the wind catches him. Here, I'll go myself."

"How you fidget over Michael," said Mrs. Swift, as old Joseph returned from poking Michael's head about, jerking his bad arm, and making him thoroughly uneasy—"and I'm sure he's coming round wonderful."

"Is he, Maria?" returned Swift, something unusual twinkling in his excitable little blue eyes. "You should have seen him and heard him in church last Sunday, when he was singing out 'Lord, now let'st,'—I couldn't stand it, Maria. I collared him and pushed him down in his seat. I felt as if he was a-singing himself off."

"What fancies you do get in your poor head, Joseph! Well, I hope you'll keep such thoughts off *next* Sunday, or we shan't have a very lively party, and most of 'em coming from such a distance, and plenty of trouble of their own."

The great family dinner coming on the following Sunday was looked forward to by the hollow-eyed invalid with much soreness of heart. All his married brothers, with their wives and children, would be there, trying to

look kindly on the one great failure and disappointment of the family—himself.

When the day came and the cloth was laid, and the little parlour was crammed with nephews and nieces and sisters-in-law whom poor Michael had never seen till then, whom it buzzed with all kinds of family interests, great and little, from Tom's chances of entering into partnership with his master to the propensity of Mary's baby for being fretful on Sundays, Michael felt himself like a great useless hulk in the midst of a gay regatta.

His brothers spoke to him kindly enough, but very little, and he did not blame them. What was there to talk about to a failure, a wreck like him? They were a little ashamed of him too, he saw, before their smart wives; even little Cicely had placed herself and her friend with a rose in his button-hole as far from her favourite brother as possible for fear some prison sign might yet be detected on him.

Here he was back in the midst of all, yet never had he felt more isolated from them.

Their small hopes stung his great despair, their small joys made the depths of his great sorrow apparent to him. What was his life to turn to? A place in the little churchyard where George had been so early sent by him seemed to Michael the likeliest and most-to-be-desired change from this present dreary helplessness and apathy.

In the middle of dinner, there was a knock at the street door.

"That's your sister, Joseph," said Mrs. Swift. "Catch *her* waiting for an invitation when anything's going on."

Old Swift commanded his youngest son to go down and open the door to his aunt, and bring her up to dinner.

"But that's not Deborah's step," said he, listening as he heard his son returning with other footsteps after him.

Knives and forks were suspended, curly heads rapped, and babies hushed, that the footsteps might be listened to, and receive due attention.

The sudden silence made Michael look round him with apathetic wonder. Then he, too, heard the footsteps on the stairs.

He no sooner did so than he rose from his chair with white lips and dilated eyes, staring towards the door.

Another instant, and his brother had come into the room, followed by the gaunt figure and long beetle-browed face so fearfully familiar to him.

Ambray was here in his father's house, and

Ma'r S'one was behind him. He was not dreaming: these two were really here!

"Give me some dinner, Swift," said Ambray, seating himself in the chair the son who opened the door to him had left vacant. "I am hungry, so is Ma'r S'one. Come, you two little girls, sit in one chair, and let Ma'r S'one have this."

It seemed to Michael that Ambray certainly had, on entering the room, glanced quickly at him and away again, though he could scarcely believe this now, so entirely did the old man appear to ignore his presence.

Swift, completely taken by surprise, placed loaded plates before his unexpected guests, and continued to remain lost in wonder and speechless amazement, vainly looking for explanation from Michael, who was even more amazed than himself.

Michael knew almost without glancing towards him that Ambray's plate remained untouched, while the grey haggard eye swept every face at table.

"You are rich in sons, Swift," he said. "I know them by their likeness to each other. And a very fair-looking likeness it is; but handsome is that handsome does, young men, remember that!"

"Cline our——"

"Hold your tongue, Ma'r S'one," said his master; "the saying doesn't concern *you*. But, Swift," he continued, turning still more away from Michael, and taking his hand from the table that its trembling might not be noticed, "you had another son once; how is it I don't see *him* here?"

"They're all here that ever I had," answered Swift, sharpening his knife. "I never lost any, nor none ever came to any harm, except—ah, except poor Michael; but as a rule, *my* children they've all been brought up as they should be; there's been no artists or geneses, or anything but what's respectable and honest ever known in the family, and I don't care who hears me say it."

"*That* son *is* here, then?" inquired Ambray, still averting his gaze from where Michael sat.

Swift laid down his knife and fork, and stared. Then to avoid more mistakes about the matter touched the miller with one hand,

while he pointed straight at Michael with the other.

"There's Michael, poor fellow, if it's him you mean."

The miller, not without an effort, turned his eyes for the first time fully upon Michael.

Michael, unable longer to remain quiet, rose, and came to the back of Ambray's chair.

Ambray turned, but instead of looking up at him, bent his head, and fixed his eyes upon the floor.

"And this is Michael Swift," he said in a voice that held all ears attentive. "Yes; I know him now. I know him by the only wages I ever gave him, that silver in his beard. I know him. You said I could never change Michael—you and Nora; I heard you. I was too old to change, you said. I believed that you were right. I felt that you were. But now, Michael, *now*, you must let age, with one foot in the grave, turn back and give youth the lie."

He laid his arms on the back of the chair and looked up. Michael looked down at him with wild incredulous eyes.

"I have heard all, Michael. I have heard how you stayed by the man who had made a Job of you, how you stayed by him and guarded him in his madness from any chains but your own honest arms. You have a strange look, Michael. Is it too late? I do not forget what house this is, whose last breath was spent here; yet remembering this, I ask you before I name him, to take his place. Is it too late?"

"Master, is it ground out?"

"It is, Michael. It is, *my son*."

"And so is his life with it," cried Swift, passionately rising, as Michael lay at the miller's feet like a felled tree.

Joseph Swift proved wrong, for Michael Ambray—the miller made him take his name—was soon as strong and as ready to enjoy to the full the sunshine of life as ever Michael Swift had been.

After two years he married a poor governess, named Nora Ambray.

Ma'r S'one was present at the wedding, and startled every one by crying out with great solemnity after young Ambray had made his vows to Nora—

"Cline our 'erts to keep this la!"

THE SYLVESTRES;

OR,

THE OUTCASTS.

BY

M. DE BETHAM-EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF "KITTY," "DR. JACOB," ETC.



WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS.

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1872.



THE SYLVESTRES.

OR,

THE OUTCASTS.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.—INGARETHA.



PLEASANT county of Suffolk, half park, half garden, with little rivers threading abundant pastures, with elm trees standing like majestic screens of subtle tracery against the blue and white heavens,

with sweeps of reddish gold corn-land, and heath-empurpled wastes running down to the unquiet northern sea,—who that loved thee with the unforgetting love of childhood but volunteers a gracious acknowledgment of thy homely beauties in later life? It is not a land of surprises. The stranger does not find himself upon the

summit of some stately Pisgah and look down upon promised lands overflowing with milk and honey, nor is there “merry walking in the sayre forest to hear the small birds sing,” not the noisy laughter of cascades in unexpected places; but delicious little fastnesses in hazel copses, where you may be imprisoned like the squirrel between the green and the blue; breezy sheepwalks covered with gorse, where you may study cloud-land for hours and hear no sound but the bark of the shepherd’s dog marshalling his charge; of rivulets plenty, and of rivers broad and bright, one or two; nor must we forget the lanes overhung with brier and honeysuckle leading to quaint little homesteads lost to the outer world, but alive with the manifold business of the farm; nor the stackyards of corn, pyramids of gold, and the hundred pastoral graces that her painters copied and her poets sang.

It is, indeed, an Arcadia, but an Arcadia of prose and not of poetry. Everything flourishes—the pigs take to the process of fattening kindly; bullocks demolish oil-cake as if they felt themselves destined to figure in a festival of Apollo; the horses are sleek and gifted with a good deal of slow but dependable understanding; the crops, whether of corn or hay or roots, are unrivalled. The people are sturdy and contented; two or three words

with them go a very long way, though mother-wit of a homely kind is not wanting. Like Suffolk dumpling this crassa Minerva can hardly be appreciated except by a native palate.

Any dreamer of Utopian dreams who should suddenly wake in this happy corner of England might well say to himself, Eureka! Surely here, if anywhere, exists an earthly paradise.

Miss Ingaretha Meadowcourt, so called from a certain ancestress, Yng.retha de Pennington, for the health of whose soul, Ralph, her husband, had given a salt-work with two patellæ to the abbey of Furness in the reign of Henry II.,—thus ran the pedigree,—owned one of the choicest spots in Suffolk, near the famous old town of St. Beowulf's-bury. She was mistress of an antique picturesque mansion, called The Abbey, of a modest but ample estate appended to it, and was lady of the manor of Culpho. No wonder that the little world of St. Beowulf's looked upon this young lady as a favoured child of fortune, and pricked up its ears when, after several years of foreign travel, she chose to settle in her country home. "What will she do with it?" asked the little world in a breath, concerning itself night and day with her future career. What she had done with it hitherto scandalised them not a little. It was now five years since she lost her father, and the greater part of those five years had been spent abroad. Instead of reading aloud to old women, catechizing the school children, dispensing Christmas doles, helping to embroider altar-cloths, and otherwise doing her duty in the parish, she preferred to travel and enjoy herself, spending one winter in Rome, another in the East, and so on. The plain truth of the matter was that Miss Ingaretha Meadowcourt had no taste for English country life, and would never have entered upon it but from a sense of duty. The monotony of it, the narrowness of it, the conventionalism of it, warred against a host of opposing idiosyncrasies. She had, moreover, inherited some unpopularity. Her father—whom she adored—had been an uncompromising Radical in a strictly Conservative neighbourhood, and to be so circumstanced is not to lie on a bed of roses. Whatever Ingaretha did amiss was doubly blamed, because it was done by her father's daughter. If she wore a dress of unusual pattern or colour, people said, "What can you expect after such a bringing-up?" If she walked on foot she was considered a gipsy; if she rode, an amazon. There was

nothing she did that was not an offence, nothing she left undone that was not an affront.

For good or for evil, however, she was a power in the place, and the Liberal and Conservative parties of society waited eagerly till she should choose sides. Hitherto she had showed friendliness all round, but as it is impossible to be friendly all round very long, the High Church set and the Low Church set alternately quaked in its shoes. Never did spiritual shepherds cast more longing looks upon stray sheep than were cast by the different clerical leaders of St. Beowulf's upon this lovely white lamb that coquetted outside the fold, refusing to be caught, converted—and shorn.

Hardly less important than Ingaretha's choice of a guide in religious matters seemed her choice of a partner in affairs temporal. Whom would she marry? asked the people breathlessly. And as there was only one person within a somewhat liberal radius who could be called a proper aspirant for such an honour, Miss Meadowcourt's choice was styled Hobson's choice, and to that person she was married by the Fates—so said public opinion—whether she willed or no.

Mr. Carew Carew's estate joined Miss Meadowcourt's. Mr. Carew Carew was neither too young nor too old for Miss Meadowcourt; Mr. Carew Carew and Miss Meadowcourt were made for each other, and there only remained the slight difficulty, that at present they did not seem to realise the fact. There is a homely proverb, "One man may lead a horse to the pond, but twenty cannot make him drink;" and it applies to sweet waters as well as bitter, to human beings as well as horses, who know well enough how good the draught would be for them, but wilfully and provokingly abstain, in spite of persuasion. Mr. Carew and Miss Ingaretha had been known to spend many and many a winter in the same southern places of resort, had visited each other from youth upwards, moreover, and had exchanged civilities whenever they happened to find themselves neighbours. It was surely unpardonable of them not to oblige universal expectation, and marry!

Miss Ingaretha Meadowcourt and Mr. Carew were just the sort of people who never oblige universal expectation, doing the things polite society told them they ought not to do, and leaving undone the things they ought to have done. Both of them preferred ease to elegance, freedom to chains, no matter how well encased in rose-leaves, and estimated the forms of stereotyped society exactly at the value of a straw. People

liked them and were amused by them, but were not a little scandalised by their frequent deviations from ordinary behaviour.

On a certain Midsummer-day, for instance, the young mistress of the Abbey entertained two or three neighbours to tea out of doors, and the following event happened, which proved beyond a doubt how unlike she was to the rest of the world.

"Why are we so dull?" she asked,—a glaring impropriety to begin with. "It is Midsummer-day. The roses are all out. We have nothing to do but amuse ourselves, and yet how dull it is!"

Close at her elbow sat the Rector of Culpho, a cumbersome and mole-like person of about forty. One might say mole-like advisedly, for he was sleek and slow, his eyes were small, and he had a habit of retiring, with ungainly haste, from the daylight of discussion to the intellectual darkness in which he lived.

"I assure you," he said gallantly, "that I am never dull when in your company."

"If I were a proper-minded person I should return the compliment," answered Ingaretha, "but you are too charitable not to forgive me!"

The rector's sentiment was echoed by the rest of the party, and emphatically by a young lady who admired him as much as he admired Miss Meadowcourt.

"Then I can only say that I envy your good temper and resignation," Ingaretha added; crying suddenly, "Ah! thank heaven there is Mr. Carew."

"I thought," said the rector cautiously, and with a little look of mortification, "that you and our good neighbour were not exactly on visiting terms?"

"We are always quarrelling like intractable children," she replied, blushing and smiling, at which the rector looked puzzled, "but it has been set-fair with us for some time now;" whereupon the rector frowned, "though I daresay the glass will go down to-day." And that set the rector at his ease again.

Mr. Carew was neither young nor handsome, but he was the sort of person about whose age and looks no one thinks for a moment, possessing that gracious manner, that delightful *naïveté*, that exquisite capacity of enjoyment, which keep a man ever young and ever fascinating.

"Always late and always welcome," said his hostess cordially; "to-day later and more welcome than ever."

"Of all the misguided little virtues I hold punctuality to be the worst," Carew said

laughing. "For whom was the fatted calf killed? For the prodigal. For whom do the angels rejoice? Not the punctual sinner, but the dilatory one. What a delicious day, and what a heavenly place, Miss Meadowcourt!"

"Yet we were so dull just now that I felt inclined to ask Mr. Whitelock to preach a sermon by way of improving the time," cried Ingaretha wickedly.

"What profanation!" said Carew; then by way of modifying the sarcasm he added, "If there are sermons in stones, much more must there be sermons in June roses and water-lilies."

"Assuredly," said Mr. Whitelock. "Does not Solomon say, 'I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys?'"

"And that is apropos of what?" asked Ingaretha.

"Dear Miss Meadowcourt, let not your understanding so often run ahead of your reverence. I do not aver that those precise verses convey present application, but words of wisdom may surely be dropped in season and out of season by a minister."

"For my part, I hold with St. Paul, that everything should be done decently and in order; and as we all seem in a serious mood, let us talk of serious things. What does Mr. Carew think of our proposed additions to the infant-school, for instance?"

"Spare me," began Carew.

"Why should we spare you? Because you have of late been so helpful to us in parish business?"

"Because it is Midsummer-day, and the roses are all out," he said. "What is so rare as a day in June?"

"I accept your plea. We will go and gather some," Ingaretha answered.

She led the way to the miniature thicket of standard roses, crimson, cream-colour, pink, and white, that skirted the little river bounding the lawn. Then, dispensing her treasures like a queen, she grew quite gay.

Anything more beautiful than the white-robed figure of Ingaretha Meadowcourt standing among her rose-trees, you could not see in the old world or the new. She was tall, and stately in her carriage; she had an abundance of the hair that poets praise, golden as the tip of wheat-sheaves in August; a frank smile that came and went unbidden as sunbeams; large blue eyes always discovering and admiring, a noble brow, and the sweetest little mouth nature ever gave a woman. And nature had been bountiful in other ways, bestowing upon her the sort of playfulness

which brightens and beautifies every-day things. Existence came to her as to a happy child, full of surprises and pleasant opportunities, and delicious little insights into hidden worlds of enchantment and grace.

They stayed in the sunshine till every one's hands were full of roses and every one's cheeks glowed, then skirting the little river for a hundred yards entered by a rustic bridge into the welcome shadow of the park. How cool it was! How fresh and enchanting! The stockdove's monotonous music seemed an accompaniment to the trills and shakes and capriccios of the thrush and the lark; murmurs of happy insects filled the air; breaths of wild roses and freshly-mown hay were wafted hither and thither; timid little fledglings flew from bough to bough, exploring the world; butterflies, black and orange and pale yellow, glanced in the sunshine; the grand old oaks looking down in their fulness and majesty as much as to say, "Be merry, ye youngsters, it is your time."

Carew and Ingaretha led the way, their playful talk and laughter sufficing for all. But a happy mood, like a cup of wine, must be replenished to continue flowing for ever, and after awhile they too grew dull and unsympathetic like the rest. It is all very well to preach the doctrine of Christian charity; who can feel charitable to the people by whom a beautiful day and a joyful opportunity have been spoiled and wasted?

Tea was soon spread on the lawn, and Ingaretha said *sotto voce* to Carew as he helped her with the tea-cups—

'If only 'one sip of this would bathe the drooping spirits in delight.'

"Beyond the bliss of dreams!" he added, laughing. "But take comfort—we will soon have some music."

The melancholy little meal was drawing to a close, and the warm lustrous day was shutting like a flower, when the gate clicked and two figures walked slowly and wearily up the avenue.

There was something inexpressibly pathetic and dignified about these wayfarers as they emerged from the dusky outer world into the gaily dressed circle, lighted up by Ingaretha's golden hair, the splendid silver tea-service, and a pyramid of white roses in a crystal vase.

The man was tall, slim, and of striking appearance, with a beautiful bloom of health in his thin old cheeks, and a beautiful look of boyishness about his face and figure, despite the white locks, soft as silk, that

reached to his shoulders. His clothes were made and mended without any regard to the eyes of the world: the pantaloons might have been cut out of a woman's gown, the coat pockets were so obviously unsafe that you felt sure there was nothing in them, his shoes were worn out, and the knapsack he bore was of the smallest and shabbiest; yet he planted his foot on the ground with a buoyant air, and greeted the company with incomparable grace.

The woman trudging by his side looked the older and the wearier of the two. She wore a broad-brimmed straw hat tied under her chin, which gave homeliness to a face not wanting in refinement, and she carried her scarecrow garments with equal resignation but less dignity than her companion. Her complexion was burnt to a deep brown, evidently by warmer suns than ours; if there was a look in her face of a great tragedy, her large benevolent careworn features were lighted up by bluish brown eyes, brilliant as jewels, her thin well-shaped lips betokened wit and character. She also bore a bundle, and like him, dropped it in order to greet Ingaretha and her guests.

"Monsieur Sylvestre!" cried Ingaretha incredulously.

"Madame Sylvestre!" said Carew, rising with hands outstretched to the pair.

"Ah! we have taken you too much by surprise," said the woman in soft plaintive French; "forgive us, dear friend, we were so impatient to see you once more."

But Ingaretha's arms were thrown around the woman's neck ere the words were fairly spoken, and after a kiss, a hand-clasp, and a whispered word of tenderest welcome, she introduced the new-comers to the rest of the party.

"How wonderful it is to see you here!" she said, making room for them on each side of her at the tea-table, "and just now life seemed so uninteresting that I thought wonders had ceased in the land. From whence do you come?"

"Straight from Africa," Monsieur Sylvestre answered, as coolly as if Africa were no farther off than St. Beowulf's; "and I will leave you to guess," casting a sly glance at the knapsack and bundle lying on the grass, "whether or no our goods and chattels have impeded our journey."

Ingaretha smiled, and asked Carew to go in-doors and order fresh cream, fresh strawberries, the largest and ripest, fresh tea, and everything to be had of the best, for her new guests. They repaid her hospitality in the

most acceptable coin, namely, that of enjoyment. Carew, who had known Madame Sylvestre abroad, found her as usual a little sad, a little regretful, but full of wit, humour, and observation. What Monsieur Sylvestre said, though addressed to Ingaretha, stirred, quickened, and bewildered the rest of the company, so piquant and original was he. The dulness that had before hung round the little party vanished like a fog, and the sun shone out. The dreary ceremonial of tea became a feast indeed. Eyes shone, cheeks glowed, laughter came and went unbidden. The water had been turned into wine, none quite knew how.

By-and-by, Carew went in-doors and began to play on the piano.

"Why should we not dance?" asked Monsieur Sylvestre of his hostess. "Our hearts are light. We have met again after divers misadventures. Let us inaugurate the joyful meeting with that immortal pastime."

"With all my heart," answered Ingaretha. The hint was given to the musician. Tables and chairs were put out of the way. Partners were chosen, and as the first airy strains of a waltz sounded from the open window, Ingaretha led off the dance with her latest visitor.

The waltz was followed by a cotillon, the cotillon by a mazurka, the mazurka by a quadrille, nor did the dancers desist till the nightingales were singing in the dusky shrubberies, and the stars were coming out one by one.

Then Ingaretha's guests, excepting Mr. Carew, drove home, a little scandalised at her way of doing things and at the impropriety into which she had led them. To dance in crowded ball-rooms and in evening costume was proper enough, but there was certainly a spice of looseness, vagabondage, call it what you will, about an improvised dance in the open air; and though they had enjoyed it during the time, they felt in duty bound to grow ashamed afterwards.

Again, Ingaretha's affectionate reception of these tatterdemalion foreigners argued ill for the future. Better churchmen and churchwomen could not be found than the gentry of St. Beowulf's, but they had only one way of reading Scripture, and were naturally shocked at such a new interpretation of the parable of the great supper. To feast the poor, and the halt, and the blind, was highly commendable; to bid the wearers of purple and fine linen and the wearers of rags to sit down at the same table, was wholly another thing.

CHAPTER II.—MONSIEUR SYLVESTRE TELLS HIS STORY.

"AND now, dear friends," said Ingaretha when the little party assembled in the drawing-room after dinner, "tell me all that has happened to you since we last saw each other. Mr. Carew will, I know, like to hear the story as much as myself."

The generous wine as well as the cordial welcome of his hostess had repaired for the time being Monsieur Sylvestre's spent forces, and he flitted from one object to another in the choicely-furnished drawing-room gay as a butterfly.

"I am never tired of telling my own story, because it is much better than other people's," he said.

"And so much sadder," put in his wife with a sigh.

"But what a joyful finale to all our misadventures!" he went on. "Well, Miss Meadowcourt commands, and I, her leal servitor, have nothing to do but obey."

He leaned back on the mantelpiece, folded his arms in an easy attitude, and was about to begin, when Madame Sylvestre rose hurriedly and placed an easy-chair beside him. "Thou art tired, Benjamin," she said almost in a whisper. He sat down and began:—

"To you, a philanthropist," he said in French, looking at his hostess, "and to you, a poet," he said, turning to Carew, "I need make no apology if at one time my love of mankind, at another my imagination, carry me away. We have spent happy days together in lovely places,—a bond of union freemasonry cannot outbid; and we have talked of those things which bind people to each other like a sacrament taken in company. The good, the true, the beautiful, how we have loved and courted them!"

He smiled, stretched out his hands, and looked eagerly forward, as if seeing visions, adding,—

"I see it all before me, the little communistic settlement in the purple plain, with its orchards of almond and fig, its corn-fields and olive gardens, its flocks and herds,—the Paradise regained, where a few choice souls lived and worked and rejoiced together as brothers and sisters. Do you remember how you came with your English friends and abode with us? What days were those! We had a week of jubilee without a common hour. The harvest of the past year had been abundant, and our store-houses were full of corn, fruit, and wine. There were no plagues in the

land. The gorgeous wild-flowers of the south covered the waste like Joseph's coat of many colours. In those innocent bacchanals we grew drunken but not with wine. Would that all humanity followed our example!"

Thereupon he glanced round at his audience with a whimsically self-convicting expression, for moderately as he had partaken of Ingaretha's Rhenish wine, he was conscious of the mounted flush on his cheek and sparkle in his eye thereby induced.

"Soon after you left us," he continued, "our troubles began. First of all, came the Arabs to plunder us. One night our goats wen', that was bad enough; but to lose our poultry was worse still, and they began by stealing the best—"

"Ah! a superb cock and five hens that never missed laying," put in Madame Sylvestre with a great sigh.

"We had dogs, and we could have got help from the soldiers," her husband went on, "but the Arabs were driven to these deeds by the direst necessity, and really wanted them more than we. In some places the colonists made no ado, but guarded their property with armed men; we, the lovers and propagandists of peace, could not do that, however painful it was to be robbed, not only on account of the value of our poor beasts, but for the want of principle and the destitution it showed on the part of the Arabs. Night after night I patrolled the premises at the peril of my life; yet the things went, sometimes a sack of grain, sometimes a hoe or a spade, sometimes a poor stray chick or duckling. However, we held up our hearts, for the corn promised well, and if the harvests were abundant everywhere the Arabs would have less temptation to maraud. But one morning, as we were dispersing to our field work, we saw flying from the south three or four silvery-winged little creatures no larger than humming-birds. My companions turned deadly pale and cried, 'The locusts! the locusts!' It was the beginning of the plague. First they came by hundreds, like little harmless swarms of starlings migrating in autumn. Then they came by thousands, by hundreds of thousands, by millions, by millions of millions, till the earth was covered with them, the heavens were darkened, the pleasant world was turned into a pandemonium. By night and day we waged war with the persecutors, but it was like throwing a tea-cup full of oil on a raging sea; slay, burn, impale as we might, the numbers seemed greater than ever. When at last the plague was over,

and the stinking carcasses of the enemy covered the length and breadth of the land, our hearts sank within us at the mischief that had been done—the beautiful young crops were ruined, the pastures were gone, the fruit trees were bare both of leaf and blossom. We knew well enough what was at hand."

Here Monsieur Sylvestre resumed his declamatory attitude by the fire-place, well-pleased at the breathless interest he had kindled in his audience. Carew listened as to a tragic story or poem, but Ingaretha's hand pressed Madame Sylvestre's, and she whispered a sympathetic word from time to time. The poor Frenchwoman smiled through her tears, saying every now and then—

"How beautifully he tells it, does he not?"

Monsieur Sylvestre went on—

"How could we help knowing it? Our sleep was haunted with haggard figures threatening to kill us if we had no bread. But the reality was worse still. First came the starving men and women we had seen in our dreams, beseeching us in their hunger. We gave what we could, but there was none to work miracles, and the little we had to spare was soon at an end. These men and women came to us no more, but instead flocked hollow eyed spectres, and raging maniacs, and human beings turned into wild beasts of hunger. We had no reason to fear for our granaries and hen-roosts, they were all empty; but our lives were not safe. 'This is my child!' shrieked one. 'Feed us to night, or he is killed and eaten!' 'You Europeans do not die,' was the cry of others. 'We will murder you unless you divide your secret stores with us.' The government sent bread, but it could not feed millions, and for weeks the people kept perishing before our eyes. Still we stayed on, hoping for better days. The fever came next—fever did I say? It was the plague, such a plague as is sure to follow dearth, famine, and cannibalism, and we had grown familiar with all these. Hitherto people had died slowly, after days of raging madness and despair, or had lain down in a corner to die like dogs.

"But now death did his work in a quicker fashion. The wail of human nature turned savage was hushed. Men, women, and little children walked about meekly with a look of death in their faces, and dropped down on a sudden. There was no mistaking that look. Few tried to heal, none to console each other. As they had died of starvation before our eyes, with none to mourn or bury

them, now they died of the fever, stricken down like soldiers in a battle-field. The whole land was turned into a tomb—the tomb of nameless hundreds of thousands.”

“Then came the worst of all,” said Madame Sylvestre. Her husband rebuked her for the interruption by a gesture, and she was silent, following his looks and words with a horror-stricken expression. The two women drew closer to each other, and Ingaretha took up the thin, brown, toil-worn hand of her companion and kissed it reverently. “How you must have suffered!” she cried.

“The awful year drew to a close under somewhat better auspices,” the narrator continued. “We had survived assassination, famine, and pestilence, and might fairly deem that the wrath of the gods was spent at last. What seed-corn we had was put in the ground, what good cheer we could muster was devoted to the inauguration of the new year. Till long past midnight our little band of musicians made merry in the streets, and with the remaining wine of our vintage we toasted the immortal memory of Fourier, the regenerator of the social world. We were sleeping peacefully as babes in a cradle when, at day-break, something that sounded like thunder awoke us. I started from my bed, but ere I could reach the window our little tenement was shaking like a bird’s nest rocked by the wind. A few seconds more, and we found ourselves in the open air, we knew not how, scared, distracted, paralysed. The earth heaved under our feet, making us sick and giddy. A horrid crash sounded in our ears. Human cries rose up on every side. ‘The earthquake! The earthquake!’ People shrieked, wept, and prayed by turns. To add to our misery, rain was falling in torrents, and we were but half-dressed. A few, indeed, escaped in their night-clothes. Some delayed escape too long.”

“Poor Blaise was lost to us that morning,” sobbed Madame Sylvestre; “he had a heart of gold, and stopped to look for his dog.”

“The Arabs taught us Christian folks a lesson then,” Monsieur Sylvestre resumed. “‘It is the will of Allah,’ they said, stalking to and fro, stately as kings, resigned as apostles. Ah, it was grand to see them!”

“They pilfered us directly our backs were turned,” put in Madame Sylvestre.

“I will leave you to imagine that day of cold, destitution, and misery. Wet to the skin, shelterless, hungry, and for once desponding, we resolved to set out in search of some encampment, where we should at least have a tent over our heads. The next vil-

lage, they brought us word, was in ruins, and the next and the next, but tents had been sent from the nearest military station, so we departed. What a journey was that! One must tread upon the heels of an earthquake to realise the awfulness of it. We got a rude conveyance, and travelled slowly by the light of a brilliant moon, in search of shelter. But there was none to spare. We warned ourselves at the soldiers’ watch-fires, and went on, passing ghastly spectres of what had been yesterday thriving little towns. Here and there a house, split like a pomegranate, stood out from the chaos of ruin. Through the stillness of the night came the wails of those who had been made widows and orphans. The beautiful little city, embosomed in orange and lemon gardens—Blidah—was deserted as if plague-stricken. There was no choice for us but to reach the coast.”

Monsieur Sylvestre paused, took breath, and added in a passionate tone of reproach and entreaty—

“Call us not cowards if the sight of the sea acted like a charm, drawing us homewards! All the treasure that we had was buried in that bewitching but most ungrateful country—sinews, endeavours, courage, patience, life-blood, hope, we gave her our all, and she repaid us thus! Decimated by fever, despoiled by savages, ruined by pestilence, unhoused by earthquake, we had no choice but to turn our backs upon the land of the palm, the fig, and the olive, and go forth, to seek bread and shelter elsewhere.”

He dashed aside a tear, and cried, stretching out his hands, as if beholding the emblematic figure he apostrophised—

“Oh, Algérie! Algérie! not thus shouldst thou have repaid the pioneers of solidarity, the disciples of the latter-day prophet! How have we loved, trusted, caressed thee! How hast thou played with us, chastised, expelled us, a band of martyrs crowned with asphodel!”

“But now you shall wear wreaths of heart’s-ease and roses,” Ingaretha said brightly, though tears were in her eyes. “Here there are at least neither locusts nor earthquakes, and you shall have a bit of land to turn into an Eden after your own heart.”

His depression vanished like a child’s tears at the sight of sugar-plums. Had the company present been disposed to hear him, he would at once have described the Utopia that was to be created under Ingaretha’s auspices, the last and best of so many. But it was already late. Mr. Carew had a ride of five miles before him; Madame Sylvestre had

dropped asleep, and even Ingaretha looked drowsy. The beautiful vision was put off till a more fitting opportunity.

Ingaretha took her friend by the hand and led her up-stairs.

"These are your rooms," she said; "I think they are the prettiest in the house, and Monsieur Sylvestre will enjoy the little dressing-room—study—call it what you like—looking across the park, and the ruined gateway of the old cottage."

"What magnificence!" said the Frenchwoman sadly, touching the furniture with gingerly hand. "What carpets, what curtains, what pretty things! Oh! Mademoiselle, this is much too good for us."

The rooms were neither very spacious nor very imposing; but the bright blue hangings, the soft Persian rugs, the easy-chairs, and hundred and one little comforts, might well strike one accustomed to fewer hardships than Madame Sylvestre. Ingaretha looked pained.

"The best cannot be too good for one's friends," she said, kissing her affectionately. "Did you not tell me so when I was your guest in your Phalanstery?"

"Ah! what was our hospitality in comparison to yours!"

Ingaretha chided her playfully, and had reached the door when, half hesitatingly, she went back again to where Madame Sylvestre was standing.

"You have not told me a word about René?" she asked, turning red as a rose. "Nor of Maddio. Where are they? What are they doing?"

"Alas, we know not. They would stay behind, though starvation stared them in the face. They could not be persuaded to quit the land of their adoption."

"But they are well?" she whispered eagerly. "The fever spared them?"

"Thank heaven, yes; Maddio made his adieux, gay as a child; poor René was a little sad, but both were well when we parted."

"Thank heaven!" Ingaretha said fervently, and then the last good night was said.

Madame Sylvestre eyed her poor mended garments ruefully as she took them off one by one. How out of place they looked amid all this elegance! Little enough she cared for finery herself, poor soul; but she was mortified through her affections. She knew that though she should ever be the same to her husband and Ingaretha whether clad in rags or satin, they suffered vicariously if she was sneered at or slighted by the vulgar.

The unwonted softness of the pillows, however, and the happy consciousness of a long and toilsome journey achieved, acted like poppy juice on weary body and brain. She fell asleep, and slept the rare delicious sleep that lasts from midnight till the matins of the birds are ended, and the hungry ploughman sits down to breakfast beside the furrows he has turned since dawn.

CHAPTER III.—POET AND PHILANTHROPIST.

PLEASANT and reviving it is to hear the sweet voice of a woman about the house, and Ingaretha had the habit of singing as she went, whenever her heart was light. Long before her guests were astir, she had breakfasted and was busy on a hundred schemes for their business and pleasure; interspersing her thoughtful moods with snatches of song. Having placed freshly-gathered flowers on the table, dawdled in the garden a little by the hand-carriage of the invalid aunt and godmother, whose home had been Ingaretha's since childhood, she mounted her unpretentious-looking mare and rode off in the direction of the village. She was no patroness of the hunt, a prodigy of equestrian excellence, but rode with the inherited ease and grace of a well-bred woman who feels as much at home in the saddle as in her court-dress.

The skylarks were singing among the pearly clouds, the fawns frisked hither and thither across the turf, a hundred little flowers were opening their eyes, the trees stood full-robed in the splendour of June. Everything looked young and gay and beautiful. By-and-by, she passed out of the park and entered a narrow by-road. To the right, stretched level fields of young green corn and rich brown fallows, divided by hawthorn hedges; to the left lay a pretty farm-house, with a well-kept flower-garden in front, an orchard, roseate as sunset cloud, with apple-blossoms on one side, farm-buildings, corn-stacks, and meadows on the other. She was about to pull up, when a straw hat appeared above the opposite hedge and Mr. Carew called out—

"Miss Meadowcourt, do ride as far as the stile, and then I can speak to you."

In two minutes he was walking beside her, talking eagerly about the Sylvestres, their strange story, their wonderful youthfulness and fortitude under trouble. Then he brought out his sketch-book with a sudden change of idea. Showing her a water-colour drawing, "See," he said, "such a weird little view lies within gunshot of these

trim fields! Will you alight for a quarter of an hour and walk with me to look at it?" he asked.

She assented, gave him her hands, soft as little birds, and sprang from the saddle. They skirted the fallow-land, Carew leading the way. As they went, a sound of pain and fear came from the hedge, and looking round, they saw a young partridge lying in

the grass, that had evidently been wounded by a hawk or some other enemy. There was something inexpressibly touching about the helplessness and despair of the little creature as it stared at them with terrified eyes, unable to fly or defend itself.

"Let us take it home to the gamekeeper," Ingaretha said, picking it up carefully. "If it is past help, it shall be put out of its



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misery. Will you put it in your handkerchief?"

He obeyed somewhat unwillingly. A few steps farther on, they saw a beautiful little mole, just thrown out of a trap, wounded, but not quite dead.

"It is hard to have no souls and yet to suffer," Ingaretha said.

"Yes," he answered; "I could show you

any happy summer morning sadder things in your thickets and glades than you dread of. Appalling, indeed, is the tragedy of Nature, and the part we play in it. We live in an age of mercy, yet the Messiah of the animal world is not yet come."

"If the human world were happier, perhaps we could spare one," Ingaretha said coldly and sadly. "Strange, that you should

feel more for the sufferings of partridges and moles than for the sufferings of men and women. When I talk to you of our poor people, you show no enthusiasm."

"A man cannot change his nature, and I cannot turn philanthropist," he said earnestly. "For your sake, would that it were possible!"

"You are a poet, an artist, a dreamer," she went on with the slightest shade of reproach in her voice, "and I can well understand how it is that you reconcile yourself to an irresponsible, pleasure-seeking—forgive me—impression seeking life. But is there not time enough to do a little work as well as enjoy a good deal of beauty?"

They were now penetrating a little hazel copse, and as they went, the little branches caught her hair, first one lock, then another, till it fell a golden shower on her shoulders. How bright she looked, how eager, how beautiful! Carew answered her, colouring to the brow—

"Seven years ago, I said to you what I say now, and what would be in my heart seven, nay, twice seven years hence, if I might then speak to you of familiar things. But I should be a hypocrite were I to pledge myself to the life you hold most estimable. I acknowledge and deplore the misery of the world, but I cannot give heart and soul to Blue-books, and social science, and criminal reform. As well blame a daffodil for not being an apple-tree, as blame a born artist for not being a philanthropist."

"You preach an easy-going fatalism in which I do not believe. Land-owners like you and I have no right to enjoy our property without undertaking its responsibilities."

"I have often wished myself quite poor," Carew said wistfully. "Had I only a hundred pounds of my own a year, I am sure you would have liked me better."

"I should have blamed you less," Ingaretha answered.

He was silent for a few minutes, then burst out passionately—

"Do not call the life wasted which is spent in the pursuit of the lovely and the good. Sweep the universe clean of all but the useful, and what would it be like!—fields without daisies, academies without poets, women without grace—good heavens! the beauty around us would degenerate into ugliness if there were neither poets nor painters to remind us of it, idealise it, interpret it. And"—he said this pointedly and bitterly—"you deceive yourself if you think that the world is only made better by

your Reform Bills and Sanitary Associations and Reformatories. Granted that the artist is an idler in these fields, are there no golden harvests to be reaped elsewhere? Shall the soul perish whilst the body be superabundantly fed?"

Ingaretha interrupted him in tones as eager as his own.

"You speak as if a song, a flower, or a happy inspiration could be to the ignorant and debased what they are to us, who are enlightened and happy. Christ fed the multitude as well as preached the truth to them."

"But the truth went first! Oh! take care how you appraise Beauty as a moralising force, quickening, exalting, enlarging. The enlightened and the happy! what a minority are they! Do we two ever meet without complaining to each other of the dead level of moral and intellectual commonplace amid which we find ourselves here? And if a spark of enthusiasm or noble feeling shines out, what breath is there to fan it into a flame? You philanthropists and realists forget that society can only be perfected by the love of intellectual beauty working from within. Can legislation or inventions, or even state education keep the spirit alive? The dreamer of noble dreams helps most of all."

"Of noble dreams we have enough," Ingaretha said sadly, "yet the people are starved, flesh and spirit."

"At least, concede a little to those who bequeath thoughts if not deeds to their fellow-creatures. A lovely fancy, a fresh ideal, how good and reviving are they! For your sake," he added fervently, "I would fain become a politician and put my shoulder to the wheel of public life, but my heart, my faith, my real self would never be in the work. Were one or two of my little songs to float down the stream of time consoling the unhappy, delighting young and old, I should count my time better spent."

She looked at him, half incredulous, half pitying.

"You despise me. I had better have left my apology unsaid," he said.

"I do not understand you," she answered, "that is all."

There seemed nothing more for Carew to say after that little speech, though his heart was full. Had Ingaretha been in a different mind, he would have brought out a poem he had written in the hayfield just before, as dainty an offering as love ever presented, but he withheld it without a hint of its existence.

They walked side by side, each rapt in secret thoughts.

By-and-by they came to the edge of a huge chalk-pit, and looking down, saw a gipsy encampment in the hollow. Descending a little way, they found themselves shut in a world of white and blue, the dazzling chalk-cliffs standing against the unclouded sky like a rampart. A fire was burning at the farther end, and the column of blue smoke rising from it gave a witch-like look to the black-haired, mahogany-skinned woman bending over the kettle. Two or three children, brown and disheveled as savages, were collecting brambles at the pit-mouth. Some bits of ragged drapery hung on the furze bushes, red, blue, and orange.

When Carew had retouched his sketch at Ingaretha's suggestion, they returned to the horses. She spoke again of her new guests, and entreated him to be kind and helpful to them, which he promised cheerfully. Pleasant talk seemed possible once more, and he grew light-hearted at finding her so trustful and comrade-like.

"You know their worth as well as I do," she began.

"And their eccentricities," he answered, smiling. "They will persuade you to turn the Abbey into a Phalanstery, after the model of the one they left in ruins, or to start a second New Harmony founded on the plans of Robert Owen."

"I cannot and will not send them away," she said eagerly. "They have suffered too much, and I love them too dearly. What is the use of living, unless we make some one happy? and I can make them happy. Will you help me to do that?"

"With all my heart—short of becoming a socialist," he answered, "or of furthering socialist conspiracies. Do they want a house to live in? or money? or anything else in my power to bestow? Only tell me what to do."

She thanked him, laughing at his impetuosity; then, telling him that she was going to consult her farm-steward, Mr. Minife, on their behalf, crossed the road in the direction of the farm-house, the groom and horse following. Carew lingered a little; but at the end of a quarter of an hour, no Ingaretha appearing, he went away. Let each misunderstand the other as they might, there was this feature in their intercourse, that even when they parted in sorrow or in anger, it was with the hope of meeting again. But for Carew's unhappy passion, indeed, they would have been excellent comrades. Again, and again,

he had said to himself that this passion should be destroyed, and a friendship recreated, phoenix-like, from its ashes; again and again love had vindicated itself—strong, young, hopeful, happy. He knew well enough that there were other women in the world, if not so sweet and lovely as she, still sweet and lovely; he knew well enough that the best part of his life was going, and that when it was gone, he should perhaps grudge the wasted affection and the hoping against hope of so many years. Like some mediæval alchemist, who spends strength, soul, and substance upon the uncaptured truth that now comes near, now eludes his grasp, now vanishes out of sight, to return and hover before him, a golden vision, he passed his days in alternate hope, fear, and ecstasy.

A very unpopular person among his neighbours was Mr. Carew. He was no sportsman, took no part in politics or county business, and entered very little into society. It was whispered that he wrote poetry, and if the writing of poetry does not stamp a country gentleman as a very poor creature indeed, what does? The world was angry with him for being an amateur, moreover. How often do we repeat the cant abuse about amateurs, as if higher praise could be given a man than that he was an artist by reason of his passion for art! To make a virtue of necessity is an easy kind of spiritual morality; we want bread, shelter, the wherewithal to be clothed, and find the world willing to furnish us with all these things provided we offer in return—what? Not material treasure and service, but the winged offspring of ethereal conceptions, heaven-born sons and daughters of Imagination and Fancy. Some of us prize these spiritual creations so far beyond the gross satisfactions of the flesh, that we cannot bring ourselves to barter the one for the other, preferring rather to supply them by means of other wares, or perhaps neglect them a little. Who is the loser by such a compact?—the poet or the world? Neither, we say; rather gainers. Whether an artist be rich or poor, having to gain his bread or no, let his work, soul-emanating and soul-reaching, be its own reward; let him, in short, study to be an amateur in the most pregnant sense of the word: to write poems, paint pictures, compose melodies for dear love's sake, naught else, were it a golden crown or a purple robe such as the saints wear in heaven. "All is not gold that glitters" is a poor proverb, oftentimes falling short of application. Is not all gold that glitters in the eyes of the lover of Beauty—the

evening-cloud, the sunset sea, the daisy's heart?

Mr. Carew's guests, whenever he happened to spend a few months at home, were very promiscuous—Italian fiddlers; artists of various nations, often in threadbare coats; occasionally a poet, than whom no untamed tiger could have created a greater feeling of incongruity among the matter-of-fact St. Beowulfians; and so on. Whatever Mr. Carew did, mystified or affronted people. Whatever he left undone, equally mystified or affronted them. That he did not marry Miss Meadowcourt affronted them most of all. In country places, it seems almost impossible to believe that a few misguided house-sparrows, red-breasts, and swallows, are not in the pay of the father of lies, to propagate tittle-tattle and scandal. Perhaps the privations of severe winters tempt them into making the bargain. Be this as it may, not a week, hardly a day passed, without some new rumour concerning the two cynosures of neighbouring eyes, Ingaretha Meadowcourt and Mr. Carew. Swiftly as if every gossamer thread were a telegraphic wire, the news of this accidental meeting and walk was straightway borne throughout the length and breadth of the place, with what commentaries and conclusions the imaginative reader may easily determine.

CHAPTER IV.—MR. AND MRS. MINIFIE.

IF there was one person in the world whom Ingaretha cordially disliked, it was her tenant and steward, Mr. Minifie. Ingaretha was an excellent landlady, and Mr. Minifie was an excellent tenant. He had been in the confidence of her father moreover, and she felt too inexperienced as yet to take matters into her own hands and get rid of him. As a tenant, she could not get rid of him, for he held an unexpired lease of several years; and as a steward, there was every reason, in a worldly point of view, for keeping him. He not only farmed after a first-rate method himself, but insisted upon the other tenants doing the same. His management of her affairs was generally allowed to be unexceptionable. "Whatever you do, my dear," said her faithful old friend and lawyer, Mr. Mede, of St. Beowulf, "keep Minifie. He's not a pleasant fellow, but he does well by your property;" and, much against her inclination, she did keep him, partly because she knew of no one to put in his place, and partly because she had no tangible excuse for displacing him. Mr. Minifie was certainly not a pleasant fellow.

He had married a woman twenty-five years older than himself for money to begin with; and having possessed himself of her fortune, cared very little what became of herself. He was one of those men who are made up of so many mean little qualities, in homœopathic proportions, that ordinary moral nomenclature falls short in cataloguing them.

Mrs. Minifie was so fortunate as to have hobbies, otherwise the monotonous money-making life to which she was tied must have proved unendurable. She loved to pose as a quack doctor to the poor people, and as a moral teacher to all the young women of her acquaintance, whether married or single. She loved, moreover, to deliver harmless little tirades against her husband. It would be hard to say which of her favourite tasks she found most agreeable—preparing doses of nux vomica and tarraxicum, giving lectures on moral, social, and religious topics, or whispering explosive little domestic secrets.

Mrs. Minifie dispensing medicine was a sight to remember. She always sat on a low stool, having her medicine-chest on the floor before her, her large untidy person attitudinised with an attempt at gracefulness, her abundant flossy hair, of mixed pale straw-colour and grey, flowing straight from the temples, her whole appearance that of a person ludicrously late recalled to vanity. Mrs. Minifie did not marry till long after she had ceased to think marriage desirable, and it cost her many and many a pang to give up, as completely as she believed that she did give up, the slothful, slatternly habits of her spinsterhood. She would occasionally so far make a sacrifice to the shrine of fashion as to buy a yard or two of bright ribbon or lappet of lace, which she would wear as incongruously as a Caffir or Cherokee; but she never grew tidy enough to fasten her buttons, lace up her shoes, clip or trim disheveled fringes, or attain to the geometrical exactitude requisite in a lady who wears caps. Mr. Minifie might go in a passion, might fling about chairs and other missiles, might wish himself unmarried a thousand times,—though often moved to promises and tears, she was never moved to repentance. The poor people employed on Mr. Minifie's farm were almost as ignorant as the Arabs who worshipped sticks and stones before the advent of Mahomet. Their little hamlet, called Peasemars, was an out-of-the-way place, and life did not seem such a priceless boon that any great efforts were made to prolong it. The chapel-goers, in case of illness, begged a dose or a plaster of Mrs. Minifie; the church-goers went to the curate's

for a saline draught or a tract: the doctor's services seemed a luxury not to be thought of. The Peasemarsch people, in other words Mr. Minifie's labourers, showed much more concern about their souls. They were a primitive set of religionists, who named their sons after the prophets or their daughters after Job's daughters. Very few of them could read or write, but they could all preach, and if a cow were taken ill, or a horse fell into a ditch, it was prayed over, and left to miraculous interposition. When the business of her dispensary was closed for the day, Mrs. Minifie would wander about the house and garden till dinner-time. Any one seeing her amongst her apple-trees on a bright summer day was reminded of some grotesque Madonna in old stained-glass windows. Her hair, of the colour of ripe barley, her large, monotonous face, her ill-shaped, gaily-dressed figure—for Mrs. Minifie loved colour as much as a Kentucky negress—stood out of the background of green and blue like the quaint conceptions of mediæval painters.

Mr. Minifie liked Peasemarsch because the land was rich and brought him wealth, but Mrs. Minifie disliked it for that very reason. She would fain have given wings to her dull days by flitting from place to place, as she had done before marriage; and it seemed very unreasonable that her husband should not feel the same. She was old and he was young, she said to herself; yet he could content himself with living out of the world all the days of his life, while she was as eager to fly off to Brighton or Paris as any school-girl of eighteen. It seemed very unnatural, and she christened Mr. Minifie's contentment by the name of perversity. By one o'clock he would return from his ride, and though it was years since she married him, his look of youthfulness struck her as a new fact every day. In the first year or two of marriage this contrast between herself and him had not been painful. He was then wont to affect chivalrous little sentimentalities and boyish ostentations of homage that compensated for it. Now all was altered. He would stroke his bright-brown head with a look that plainly said, "Not one grey hair yet!" he would crack nuts with his sound white teeth; would leap a five-barred gate whenever she happened to be walking with him, and insist upon her going round by some other way; would ever feed her wonder, in fine, patented his youth and strength upon every occasion. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Minifie had delicate palates, and their meals were ill-provided, ill-cooked, and ill-served to such a pitch that, excepting

to themselves, eating in their house was a time of dire probation. The asparagus was never brought to table till it had run to seed; the chickens were allowed to fatten about the granaries, whilst their lean old parents were killed and cooked; the cream went into the churn, whilst they complacently put sour milk into their coffee and rancid butter upon their bread. They did not make a merit of this, or do it by way of mortifying the flesh, but Mr. Minifie was economical, and had his way.

To Mrs. Minifie the days at Peasemarsch were like common clay vessels, made to hold water and not wine. She envied other people's crystal cups filled with choice Falernian, and blamed her husband for not entering upon her feelings. "You never seem to think I want any pleasure," she would say with a sigh, "yet in my heart I am younger than you." Which was true, for in some things she was very young indeed. "Do I take any pleasure myself?" he would retort brutally; "if I did you might find fault with reason." One indulgence he allowed her, and that was an old hooded phaeton, in which she took an airing every day. There is an elective affinity in things as well as in persons, and Mrs. Minifie's coachman, carriage, and horse seemed made for her. The horse was a ponderous, sandy-coloured beast—as clumsy about the pasterns as his mistress about the ancles; the driver, one of those hopelessly good-tempered Suffolkers whose mental fog no light of education can reach; and the carriage matched all three, being antiquated, cumbersome—a graceless legacy of past generations. "What a horse, what a trap, what a scarecrow inside!" Mr. Minifie would say to himself whenever he saw his wife setting out on a drive; and she knew well enough that he said or thought it.

Ingaretha's visit was an event at Peasemarsch. Mrs. Minifie threw down her novel with a sense of relief, thinking it much better to see one person who was young, handsome, and interesting, than to read of twenty who were superabundantly gifted with all kinds of fascinating qualities.

She rose from her seat, cordial, inquisitive, full of gratitude for so welcome an interruption. If only Ingarethas, with golden hair and piquant talk, would drop from the skies every day, life would be endurable.

"I didn't believe Mr. Minifie a bit, when he told me you were settled at the Abbey," she said. "How could you bring your mind to it?"

"I never intended to live out of England altogether," Ingaretha answered, shaking Mrs.

Minifie warmly by the hand ; " I love the old place a great deal too much for that."

" But how much pleasanter to be running about the world and seeing different things every day ! Ah ! I envy you. I shall never see Paris any more, and I daresay you were there three or four weeks back. Mr. Minifie keeps me as much of a prisoner as if I were a lunatic."

" I hope he will let you come and see me sometimes," Ingaretha said, not knowing whether to look gay or serious. " I should like to go with you among the poor people."

" What an odd notion ! But I am always telling Mr. Minifie that the world is turning topsy-turvy, and that his theories are out of date. If you wish to befriend the labourer, manage your affairs yourself, dear Miss Meadowcourt. That is my advice."

Ingaretha opened her eyes incredulously.

" Well, get to know them as well as I do, and judge for yourself. How is it that your land brings in more rent than other people's ? By squeezing the tenants. How is it that the farmers make up their rent ? By squeezing the labourers. Mr. Minifie boasts of his account-books. Well he may. He does his duty by you ; but it's a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul."

" I am very sorry to hear this," Ingaretha said. " It is quite new to me."

" You have not been penned up in this dull spot for ten years, as I have, with only the poor people to speak to, or you would understand very well how Mr. Minifie manages things. Not that I dislike poor people. If one is shut up in prison, rats and spiders become better company than none at all."

" When I was a little girl, in my dear father's lifetime," Ingaretha made answer, " I used to be very fond of going amongst the poor people, and it is my duty to do what I can for them now."

" Oh ! you are too young to talk so."

" I am twenty-six," she answered, with great seriousness.

" What a pity to take up good works at your time of life ! If you do that now, what will you take to when you are old and hardened in sin like the rest of us ? But here's Mr. Minifie : he'll tell you the poor people eat roast beef and plum-pudding every day, and look forward to the workhouse as a paradise. Don't believe a word he says, and do the exactly opposite of what he tells you."

Mr. Minifie came in—young, brisk, good-looking. " Janey," he said, " how could you let Miss Meadowcourt sit in such an uncom-

fortable chair ? Janey, have you offered Miss Meadowcourt some new milk ? Janey, ask Miss Meadowcourt to go into the other room, it is so much cooler. Janey, you must sit quite still whilst Miss Meadowcourt and I talk on business ;" and so on. When at last preliminaries were settled, he descended upon hay crops, new fences, leases, and repairs for upwards of an hour, Ingaretha listening with forced interest.

" There are two things I want to talk about," she said, as soon as his reports seemed drawing to an end. " In the first place, I want a small farm to let to a friend."

" Friends never pay rent," rejoined Mr. Minifie.

" In this case, I should not expect him to pay it," Ingaretha answered, with a smile and a blush. " I know it sounds unbusiness-like, but such is the case. An old friend of mine, one of the persons I value most in the world, has come to England, and a few acres of land would make him quite happy. I would willing sacrifice a little money to do that."

Mr. Minifie's eyes looked the things courtesy forbade him to utter.

" You think me unpractical, I know, Mr. Minifie ?"

" Quite so, Miss Meadowcourt. Give away half-a-crown rather than lend three shillings any day : you run no risk, and your mind is easy. No, I could not reconcile it to my conscience to have a hand in the making of such a pie."

" But," Ingaretha answered persistently, " if I chose to buy a little more land myself, for the sake of letting it to a friend on my own responsibility, I should not then compromise your conscience ?"

" Of course not," Mr. Minifie answered. " Or you could let the first farm that falls vacant to any one as ignorant of farming as I am of book-learning. But I really must decline to manage your affairs when I cannot deal with your sixpences and shillings as fairly as if they were my own."

Ingaretha made no answer. Much as she disliked the matter and manner of his speech, she was obliged to admit that there was reason on his side.

" However," he added, " as there is not a lease that expires for three years, I hope to have the honour of serving you till then. If you were proposing to me the best farmer in the county, he would have to wait till next Michaelmas three years."

" But surely there are a few acres to let or sell somewhere in the neighbourhood ?"

" Miss Meadowcourt, you might almost as

well try to find a cow versed in the catechism. If you wanted five hundred or a thousand, I could find something to suit you to-morrow."

"There is Mr. Moyse's little farm," put in Mrs. Minifie, looking up from her seat. "You told me yesterday that he was going to sell it and retire next Michaelmas."

"Now, Janey, do allow my business with Miss Meadowcourt to be transacted without interruption. Mr. Moyse's place will sell as dear as fire is hot, and is a seventy-acred farm. Miss Meadowcourt speaks of a few acres."

"How much money would be required to hire or buy it?" asked Ingaretha.

"Seven or eight hundred pounds might cover stock, crop, and valuation; and for the purchase, I should say they would ask not less than three thousand pounds. But I'll look about for what you want, Miss Meadowcourt—shall we say three or four acres?"

"Let me have the first chance then, for there is no time to lose."

"Excuse me, but I hope you won't go in for fancy farming on a larger scale. For you'd make ducks and drakes of a thousand pounds in no time."

"And isn't that Miss Meadowcourt's own affair?" asked Mrs. Minifie, lifting up her large flossy head from the ottoman. "Dear me, what liberties you take, to be sure!"

"I have something else to say to you," pursued Ingaretha, before Mr. Minifie could retort. "When will the workmen begin the new cottages? I particularly wish them to be put in hand as soon as possible."

"They shall set to work at once; but I don't think a chicken will come out of that egg, Miss Meadowcourt. To help the poor here and there is like feeding two or three pigs on cauliflowers, and turning them into a cabbage garden without rings in their noses. Let all be coddled, or all be treated like grunTERS, I say. You build a dozen cottages fit for gentlefolks to live in. Nobody else follows your example, and the consequence is that you make twelve labouring families stuck-up, and two or three hundred envious and discontented."

"The more discontented the better," Mrs. Minifie put in.

"I quite agree with you," Ingaretha answered. "The poor have no right to be contented till the rich behave differently to them. I, at any rate, don't mean to let them be herded together like cattle because my neighbours are indifferent to it. And there is another matter on my mind, Mr. Minifie.

Why are all the footpaths being gradually done away with? For you and me who can ride or drive wherever we want to go, short cuts are of little consequence; but for those who have to walk miles after their work, they are real boons. We ought to attend to this."

"Just as you please, Miss Meadowcourt; but I don't think you see what all these things will lead to. The poor won't bear spoiling, and if you once begin to tell them that everybody ought to feed well and lie warm, they'll claim your own dinner and feather-bed in a twinkling. Tell them everybody ought to be educated, and they'll soon find out they're too good for their places. I don't say the poor have a good time of it, they couldn't have a much worse; but how we are to better them without hurting ourselves? The parsons, I take it, know what they are about when they preach contentment Sunday after Sunday. Change their tune, and they would soon find things taking a different turn."

"I think things are taking a different turn," Ingaretha said; "and I am sorry you don't welcome the signs of change. But I must go now."

She made her adieux abruptly and rode home; trying to escape from the sordid atmosphere of the farm. This was the man who had hitherto represented her property! This was the man whom friends, trustees, and advisers called "worth his weight in gold!" This was the man in whose hands lay the cause of the poor!

Summer seemed banished from the world in a sudden, and dread after dread, chimera after chimera, filled her mind. She almost wished that the fates had ordered otherwise for her, and that, instead of being lady of the manor of Culpho and mistress of the Abbey with its rich acres, she was a penniless maiden, dowered only with the love of a man as loyal as Carew.

CHAPTER V.—HAPPY HOMES.

BUT at the Abbey summer still reigned supreme. Monsieur and Madame Sylvestre found themselves, like good children in a story-book, visiting a fairy godmother. It seemed at first difficult to select one enjoyment from among so many. There was the library to begin with, and what lover ever wooed a long-absent mistress so rapturously as the scholar his beloved treasure-house after painful years of separation? These weather-beaten travellers had not looked for decades on stately rows of vellum and calf, nor turned

with reverent fingers the thick, cream-coloured page, nor feasted with unwearied eyes upon the generous type, nor enjoyed the hundred nameless pleasures of literary epicureanism. Monsieur Sylvestre flitted for a while from book to book like a butterfly in a flower-garden, then settled himself luxuriously in an easy-chair before the open window. But he could not rest long anywhere. The rose-leaves wafted across his pages, the sweet smells and happy sounds that came in with every puff of wind, the unaccustomed atmosphere of ease, elegance, and repose, intoxicated, disturbed him. He put down his book, and stepped out on to the terrace.

"Come, Euphrosyne," he said, "thou must be idle too. Such a day as this is to be drunk to the last drop, like a draught of wine."

They descended to the garden, wandered along the flower-bordered banks of the tiny river for awhile, then meeting a gardener, begged to see the orchard and aviary. He led them across a spacious stone court, in which a superb peacock was sunning himself, into a greenhouse glowing like Aladdin's garden. There under long glass roofs were strawberries large as plums, cucumbers blue with bloom, sea-green marrows embedded in yellowish leaves, purple veined figs, clusters of vine leaf and tendril, oranges just catching a gleam of gold, and innumerable luxuriant and lovely things. The salad beds struck Madame Sylvestre as most worthy of admiration, and whilst her husband went into raptures at the familiar sight of almond trees in blossom, she stooped down and gathered a waxy lettuce leaf tenderly.

"Ah!" she ejaculated aloud, "how often has hunger been stayed by thee! Thou friendly little leaf! Nature is kind, and sends her fruits, like sisters of charity, among the needy and suffering."

And she munched it for old acquaintance-sake. They were next led to the poultry yard, which was noisy, fluffy, democratic with the teeming life of June. Not that the democracy of an amateur's plump, pampered Cochin China and bantams at all resembles the democracy of the barn-door Dorking and the dung-hill cock; where every one gets plenty, no one need pick out his neighbour's eyes for a grain of barley. But the monotony of feathered existence would be unbearable without a good round fight now and then. The best of hen mothers are savagely jealous of their neighbours' offspring, and peck at any stray chick or duckling out of sheer malice;

the bantam cock who has been bred and born in an atmosphere of peace, will stand on tip-toe, puff out his feathers, and make an assault on his brother bantam when the humour seizes him; and the beautiful glossy grey guinea fowls—apparently the Quakers of the animal world—glory in onslaught, blood, and battle.

Then they were taken to the neathouse to see the cows—happy cows—that were cropping the thick grass of Ingaretha's pastures all day long, except at milking time. How fat, how clean, how intelligent they looked! Madame Gay, who remembered with pangs the poor, lean, dejected beasts they had been compelled to kill and eat in Africa, apostrophised these privileged sisters almost reproachfully.

"Dost thou remember our poor Marie, our Pepita, our Cosette?" she said to her husband. "When we went to them for the milk they could not bestow, they looked pitiful as starving mothers on their sucking babes,—the dear, patient, unhappy creatures!"

After the neathouse much remained to be seen: the dairy with its marble slabs, its bright crimson jars full of golden cream awaiting to be churned; its milk-troughs, lakelets of fresh milk on whose surface the cream was gathering; its red-brick floors kept wet and shiny as the pavement of an imperial bath; its churns of newest fashion; its fanciful array of butter and cheese moulds in clean white wood. And after that there were the stables, the dog-kennels, and the laundry to see, and many other appurtenances of a well-kept country-house, equally new and delightful to them.

Monsieur Sylvestre was in raptures. Though an Englishman by birth, and only adhering to a French appellative out of respect to his French wife, it was so long since he had been in his native country that he had almost forgotten its domestic luxuries. What was new to her was equally new to him. What moved her to tears and retrospection, moved him to joy and castle-building. He enjoyed and dreamed, she enjoyed and remembered.

By-and-by, what with the bright sunshine, the abundant ease, and the number of new impressions, he grew drowsy, finally fell asleep in a seductive summer-house. Madame Sylvestre trotted in-doors, brought out a well-worn plaid, which she carefully bestowed about his shoulders, fearing that he might take a chill in the terrible English climate, of which she had heard so much, and then set out for a walk.

She did not stroll hither and thither like

an ordinary loiterer, but kept to the straight road leading to St. Beowulf's Bury. It was a hot, dusty, drowsy afternoon, and she rested every now and then, sheltering herself under her queer old yellowish-green umbrella, and making a fan of a large dock leaf. St. Beowulf's was four miles from Culpho, which she knew well enough, as she had made the journey the night before. Four miles were not appalling, however, to so tried a pedestrian. Though long past middle age, she walked steadily and at times quickly, reaching St. Beowulf's as the farmers were beginning to come home from market; some in trim dog-carts, some in low pony-phaetons, a few only in old-fashioned gigs. The prosperity of every one bewildered her. Even the labourers' wives, returning with heavily-laden baskets, wore smart bonnets and gowns. Was there no poverty in this happy England?

She trudged on, looking to the good country people a scarecrow indeed, what with her broad-brimmed, strong straw hat tied under her chin, her foreign umbrella, her oddly-fashioned garments, her home-made shoes. Then two rude little rustics, keeping rooks, cried though the hedge, "There goes Madam Guy Faux!" and some of the women stared and made faces at each other; but she only said "Bon jour," taking the ill-mannered little criticism in good part. The quiet beauty of the old town, of which one might say now as was said by Leland three

centuries ago—"The sun hath not shone on a town more delightfully situated." The little river Larke winds amid the flower-gardens that encircle what was once the villa of Berdoric, who bequeathed it to Edmund the Martyr. Around are softly undulating fields and pastures, amid which rise in sombre majesty the ancient gateway and town, remains of what was once so large a monastery as to be called a town.

The stately old gateway, the vast ruins of the Benedictine Abbey, enclosing a fairy-like little lake and garden, the noble church, with its graveyard running alongside the river, all these made up, if not an imposing, a picture pleasant to dwell on. The graveyard was the favourite promenade of St. Beowulfians, and no wonder. Shadowed by lime trees, bordered with flowers and evergreens, fresh, cool, and quiet always, people came hither to read books beside the ruin, to make love in the alleys, and to discuss serious questions under the church porch. Seats were abundant, and Madame Sylvestre feeling at last weary, sat down and fell fast asleep. When she awoke the afternoon was drawing to a close, and she had to bestir herself to accomplish her errand. After many rebuffs, she obtained permission to give French lessons in the family of a small confectioner, at the rate of a shilling an hour and as much refreshment in the shape of halfpenny buns as she desired. This at least was a step.



PART II.

CHAPTER VI.—CLERICAL LOVE-MAKING.



WHAT with his concern for her spiritual and temporal welfare, the rector got little sleep on the night following Ingaretha's garden party. First, the apparition of the shabby foreigners disturbed him, and he saw following in their train a nimble host of bright sovereigns and bank-notes that had been bewitched out of Ingaretha's pocket; he turned his head on the pillow, and lo! matters were not mended in the least, for now he saw Ingaretha plucking her roses for Carew when no one else was by, and Carew caught a stray lock of her beautiful hair and kissed it, she smiling gravely, but without affront. The rector, dreaming all this, and waxing more impatient than behoved a man of his calling, seized the pillow, gave it a violent shake, as much as if he thought the evil spirits would tumble out, and once more laid down his head. But the evil spirits seemed more lively than ever, and leagued hand and glove against him. He fancied himself becoming a veritable hailstorm of roses, pieces of money, bank-notes, blue ribbons; wry faces were made at him by no heads in particular; Ingaretha and Carew paid not the least attention to his troubles, but swam lazily among the water-lilies; at last, the foreigners, in their waltz, pushed him clean into the water, with which crowning agony he awoke.

To go to sleep again under such circumstances would have been folly, and the rector, having dosed himself with the first thing in the shape of medicine that came handy, put on his dressing-gown and began to write. He always wrote out any important speech he should have to make in

the course of the day beforehand, reconnoitring his forces much after the fashion of an anxious general, placing a phalanx of arguments in the van, lighter metaphors and airy hopes to arm weak places, and the invincible artillery of theological dicta in the rear. Now, it must be admitted that making love to a beautiful woman, and making war upon an aggressive Dissenter, are not quite the same thing; and the rector had not come out of the latter kind of warfare with such flying colours as to warrant any very rapturous results from the former. But his cause was good and his adversary was a woman, one of the "weaker vessels," in the language of the Church. He plumed himself vastly on belonging to the nobler order of created beings, namely, man, and the noblest order of social beings, namely, parsons. Carew certainly possessed the first privilege, but he was a poor creature, even according to Ingaretha's own showing: a dawdler, a dreamer, a writer of verses!

So the rector's pen flew over the paper, and the light veil of the summer night was drawn from the earth, and the thrushes began their rehearsals in his little garden ere he had done. He felt drowsy after such severe intellectual exertion, and putting the manuscript under his pillow, slept the sweet sleep of that incomparable anodyne, self-convicted sageness, for upwards of three hours. Refreshed and hopeful, he awoke. When breakfast was over, and the sermon for the following Sunday partly written, he walked about his fruit-garden, notes in hand, culling sweets of his own wisdom, and the sweets of his own cherry trees, alternately. First, a cherry, big, blood-coloured, dewy, was popped into the rector's mouth; next, an argument, rounded, unctuous, delectable, was lodged, as he fondly hoped, in the recesses of Ingaretha's understanding.

The lesson fairly learned, and the mid-day meal of corned beef and cabbage dispatched, he set out on a round of parish visits, intending to take Ingaretha by storm on his way home. Having administered a severe reprimand to the mother of some Sunday-school children, who had sent them to church with long curls and blue hat-ribbons, reminded a recalcitrant tithe-payer that the half-yearly sum of five shillings and fourpence farthing was somewhat overdue, and lectured a parishioner upon his non-appearance at church, he betook himself to the Abbey.

As luck would have it, the lady chanced to be alone. On his way through the hall he heard little snatches of song, and found her at the piano turning over the leaves of a music book.

"If you are a magician," she said, "charm Monsieur Sylvestre into singing at church. What a congregation you would soon have!"

"Has he a very good voice?" asked the rector, half piqued and half inquisitive.

"Of an angel. Just that and no more," and Ingaretha made the most bewitching little gesture of admiration, adding, "And if he is almost an angel, Madame Sylvestre is one quite."

The conversation was turning upon the very subject the rector had promised to treat so eloquently. To warn her of these people, to exhort her to prudence in dealing with them, to point out to her the consequences of harbouring atheists, freethinkers, social vagabonds—who could tell what else?—in the parish; then to open his arms and beg her there to seek safety and refuge for evermore. This was his programme. He began part the first.

"Are you quite sure, my dear Miss Meadowcourt—and being the parish priest, I speak as one having authority—are you quite sure that in such evil days of heterodox teaching and lax theology, you are acting discreetly when you invite foreigners, perhaps unbelievers, to take up their abode here?"

The misguided little sparrows, you see, had been telling tales to the rector.

Ingaretha resigned herself to a quarrel, sighing good-naturedly.

"You said a long time ago that you would not talk to me about heterodoxy any more. I never quite understand what you mean by it. As to these dear friends of mine, the Sylvestres, they have had little else but hardship and misfortune all their lives, and I certainly shall offer them a refuge now. Not to do so, would be to outrage the very doctrine of charity you so often preach about."

"But I preach about faith too," cried the rector briskly. "Where you cannot understand, have faith. I am your sincere friend, and if you were in the habit of submitting your judgment to mine when perplexed and divided between two minds, I feel sure the result would be satisfactory."

"To whom?" asked Ingaretha wickedly. "The Sunday before last you said, 'the wise woman buildeth her house,' and does not that text apply to me too? I try heartily to build my house, in other words, to make the best of my life."

"Ah, you are ensnared by the self-confidence of youth! Dear young lady, be warned by me. It is not so easy for a young person to manage spiritual and temporal affairs, single-handed, and especially amid the temptations that beset your sex. People will fawn upon you and flatter you, and get as much out of you as they can. They will do what is a hundredfold worse, beguile you into all kinds of dangerous doctrines and seductive theories. I see but too well that the tendency of your mind is to venture ahead of riper experience, and to act independently of older counsel. Take refuge in an affection that is not so extravagant as to mislead, and not so pretentious as to inspire mistrust."

He was about to add "Marry me," when she, divining the climax, interrupted him.

"I do try to do my duty, but I cannot do it after the apologetic fashion you hold so commendable in women. I own my shortcomings; though," she added quickly, "I do not recognise your authority to correct them."

"I am willing to take you with all your faults," said the rector touchingly.

"But I am unwilling to take you with all your virtues. For once and for all, let me speak out my mind. I could not marry you, Mr. Whitelock."

She rose in her impatience and walked from window to window, fain to escape but loth to offend. The rector dwelt at length and in a monotonous voice on the temptations and dangers to which she was sure to expose herself if she selected no clerical staff to lean upon early in life. Impostors would single her out and make a tool of her. Unbelievers would ensnare and bewitch her for their own wicked purposes. From both a worldly and a spiritual point of view she would be as a sheep having no shepherd, and what a shepherd lay at her feet! Ingaretha smiled and yawned behind her beautiful white hand. He was too good-natured to make her angry, and too much of a friend to be sent away cavalierly.

Tea occurred as a happy thought, and of this the rector partook with eagerness. So much talking had made him thirsty. She heaped his plate with strawberries, once, twice, thrice, before he made a feeble remonstrance. It was very pleasant to have her so kind to him, but what a heavenly pleasure it would be take tea with her every day, and to have the right to bring down that proud spirit! A little masculine rule was all she needed to make her perfect in the eyes of man; a little theological rule to make her perfect in the eyes of angels. She refused

both chances of perfectibility and his own homage into the bargain. Inconsequence of women!

"How good these strawberries are!" she cried, smacking her lips with childish enjoyment.

"Excellent, indeed."

"Let us enter into a compact not to quarrel any more from this time henceforth and for ever."

"It is my desire to live at peace with all men," replied the rector, "though the plain speaking required of a priest oftentimes gives offence when no offence is meant. When I speak of your faults, for instance—"

"Miss Ingaretha's faults!" said the sweet voice of Monsieur Sylvestre at an open window. "Oh! physician, first make thyself whole and then prescribe for others."

The rector turned very red and rose from his seat, not knowing what to do. Ingaretha put her hand in Monsieur Sylvestre's arm with an affectionate smile and drew him to the tea-table.

With that suave dignity which accepts homage more as a right than as a privilege, the old man let her minister to him and adore him. The rector saw at once how matters stood. He made his adieux, awkwardly and in haste, feeling that he had no place among these enthusiasts. They used a language with which he was not familiar. They lived in a world as far removed from him as Capricorn from Cancer. He walked slowly homeward, looking back on the fine old Abbey, and the beautiful old trees, and the little river, with wistful though unlover-like sighs. He admired Ingaretha. He sadly wanted her to hand over the stewardship of her acres, and of her soul into the bargain, to him. It was very hard that women should have wills of their own, and he looked forward to feminine submission as one of the most desirable attributes of a millennium, should a millennium be decreed upon earth.

Freed from his company, Ingaretha and her guest were like singing-birds escaped out of a cage. They laughed, they talked, they sang. How eloquent he was, how witty, how inspiring! How lovely was she, how sweet and good!

All the mellow wisdom was brought out of him, all the sparkling vivacity out of her. They were as much in love with each other as the earth is in love with the spring. His beautiful old age moved, transported, exalted her, whilst the freshness and gaiety of her youth filled his soul with delight. Their

intercourse, compared to the frigid intercourse of every-day society, was as tropical verdure to wastes of sand, every step revealing new colours and new enchantments. When Madame Sylvestre came in, dusty and footsore, she found them discussing the Arcadia that was to be, namely, her husband's little farm, which was ploughed, sowed, and reaped ere any practical difficulties recurred to his mind.

"My banks shall be planted with strawberries, and my pillows shall be stuffed with thistledown," he said. "Nothing shall run to waste, and nothing shall bring forth less abundantly than generous nature bids. Euphrosyne shall have a cow to tend (may the spirit of one of her lost benefactors animate it!), a pig, and some poultry, whilst I sow my corn and till my ground happy as a king."

"But we must get the money first. I have already found pupils, and by dint of economy we may achieve a little capital."

"Oh! Madame Sylvestre," said Ingaretha reproachfully, "have I not money enough and to spare? At least, let an old friend do you that paltry service."

"We will put off talking of loans till to-morrow," Monsieur Sylvestre said, blithe as ever. "I readily admit to Miss Ingaretha that we arrived here destitute of worldly possessions, though rich in memories and hope." He turned out his empty pockets with the *naïveté* of a schoolboy, and added, "What is wealth material to wealth intellectual? Our dear hostess knows well enough that we are millionaires in a spiritual, if paupers in a worldly, point of view. Let us not be ungrateful, but accept the welcome things she gives us, pressing upon her our very best in return."

"You can give me so much," Ingaretha answered, holding out a hand to each. "How lonely I was till you came! How unloved and uncared for! If you will stay with me, and love me, and help me, you will repay a hundredfold any poor kindnesses of mine."

There was such unspeakable appeal and trust in her eyes, that they stooped to kiss her, answering her that way. The compact sealed, all talk of business was put aside for the rest of the day, and they gave themselves up to enjoyment. Monsieur Sylvestre had a voice of rare power and sweetness, and with Ingaretha for accompanist was content to sing for hours. They were equally content to listen. Melody after melody of the divine Schubert gave wings to the balmy hours. When the dinner came, which, with its flowers and shining silver services and

choice meats, seemed a daily banquet to the wanderers, a calm had fallen on the spirits of all three. Ingaretha forgot the love that troubled, and the friendship, under the guise of love, that intermeddled. The life she had chosen for herself, half in fear and trembling, half in aspiration and faith, seemed no longer what it had done a few weeks back—arid, isolated, narrow. Here, at least, she had two friends, on whose affection she could rely—not friends, it is true, of a decade's standing, much less was their friendship an inherited treasure, like pearls, family portraits, gold epergnes. But it is with friendship as with love. For a long time Life has droned and drowsed like the sleeping princess in the fairy tale, and, lo! on a sudden the voice of the enchanter breaks the spell. Monotony vanishes, stagnation breaks up into rainbow colours and golden light; the sound of the welcome voice is followed by a thousand echoes sweet as itself.

CHAPTER VII.—A ROMANTIC ADVENTURE.

MRS. MINIFIE took her carriage airing as regularly as an empress or state duenna. At two o'clock her cumbersome old hooded phaeton and sandy-coloured horse, as clumsy about the pasterns as his mistress about the ankles, would be led to the front door by Jabez the coachman. Whilst Smiler amused himself with a mouthful of clover stolen on the way, Jabez proceeded to put on his best hat and coat. First he fumbled laboriously for one armhole till he grew purple in the face, then he went on a voyage of discovery for the other. The second being found, he set his teeth and began to shake himself as if in a cataleptic fit. Having fairly wriggled into the coat, there remained the hat to be brushed, put on, taken off, brushed again, and readjusted, till the right medium was obtained. Then he dozed quietly till his mistress's appearance would be heralded by a succession of bundles which were thrown into the carriage one by one; after awhile Mrs. Minifie descended slowly.

Mr. Minifie chuckled behind his apple trees as he saw his wife get in, stockings down, bonnet awry, finger-ends of her gloves hanging down like claws of the plesiosaurus, one scarf tied round her throat as if it were the ribbon of the Legion of Honour, another worn loosely like a nun's rosary, a black lace sleeve on one arm, a white lace sleeve on the other, and unaccountable tags, bobbins, and tassels flying in all directions. As Jabez drove off, Mr. Minifie would whistle to himself, as much as to say, "What a trap!

What a scarecrow inside! What a turn-out!"

But Mrs. Minifie, though not insensible to her husband's sneers, felt happier upon these occasions than upon any other. Nature has no poor relations, and welcomes alike the noble and the insignificant; the birds sang and the wild-flowers blossomed for Mrs. Minifie as much as for the most beautiful soul going, and she had soul enough to rejoice in them. As she drove through the shady Suffolk lanes, a thousand things pleased, soothed, and exhilarated her. The common sunshine was something; and as she drove along, friendly faces of cottagers' wives nodded from their gardens, and little flaxen-haired children ran out to open gates for her, knowing well enough that they would receive a halfpenny and a smile. The prettiest received a penny and two smiles, but as the reason of this partiality was unknown, no angry feelings came into play.

Smiler had an awkward habit of going down on his knees when she happened to feel lazy, and Jabez happened to doze, which was pretty often. There were no hills to speak of for miles round, but just as a thief will steal without really fine opportunities, so Smiler would stumble upon the smallest provocation. The accident had occurred a hundred times, and yet it always created a certain amount of excitement; for, if a thing of beauty is a joy for ever, much more is a thing of comedy! And to see Smiler go down and the large wild figure of Mrs. Minifie go up, never grew a stale pleasure to the people of Peasemarsch. Mrs. Minifie's person, like the Cumean Sibyl, seemed to grow larger and larger under the influence of her agitation. Her unwieldy figure swelled and swelled till the capacious carriage was more than full. Her flossy, barley-coloured hair fell about her shoulders in trebled, quadrupled bulk, like that of the shock-headed Aïssoûia Arab when invoking the Djinns in his horrible dance. She stretched out her hands, she shouted, gesticulated, apostrophised, but from those empyrean heights no chivalrous St. Beowulfian had as yet delivered her. Appeal as she might, she knew well enough there was nothing to do but wait till Smiler was on his legs again, and Jabez restored to self-possession.

This day, however, as the stereotyped accident occurred, and half-a-dozen ploughmen and boys were looking on, open-mouthed—in this Bœotia one might fancy the brain was situated in the stomach, so invariably do people open their mouths when

trying to receive a new idea—Monsieur Sylvestre happened to pass that way. Never was mediæval damsel more gallantly rescued by noble knight than Mrs. Minifie by him. To scale the precipitous sides of the fortress-like carriage, to bear Mrs. Minifie safely to the ground, to soothe and inspirit her with a few tender phrases, to chide the apathy of the lookers-on, was the work of moments only. In the twinkling of an eye, the aspect of the whole affair was changed. The bacon-eating bystanders crept away crest-fallen, one even approached to offer a helping hand, Jabez bestirred himself with unwonted activity, even Smiler looked repentant. Mrs. Minifie was transformed, not only into a victim but a heroine.

"Madame must rest awhile before proceeding on her journey," said Monsieur Sylvestre with solicitude. "Madame will allow me to accompany her to the first neighbouring place that offers? Adjust the harness and follow us," he added to Jabez, waving his hand, then arm-in-arm, the rescuer and the rescued betook themselves to the curate's house, which was close by.

"What insensibility!—what gross selfishness!" he said, his sweet silvery voice and pathetic enunciation charming Mrs. Minifie as she had not been charmed for many a long year. "It is painful to see how seldom people care to exercise their best qualities. Every one of those peasants possesses a divine spark, yet because it has never been fanned into a flame, they remain dullards and egoists all the days of their lives."

"Oh! poor things! they are so ignorant, you know," Mrs. Minifie made answer. "They are too stupid to help a cow if it falls into the ditch."

"Why not teach them, dear lady? Is it not acknowledged to be the mission of women to enlighten by their instincts, inspire by their beauty, soften by their grace? You are a woman, and you despair of the progress of the world! Rather put your hand to the plough, and do your part to further it."

"I do what I can," answered Mrs. Minifie, flushing and stammering like a girl of sixteen. "I spend three pounds a year in homœopathic medicines and as much again in tracts and hymn-books."

Monsieur Sylvestre shook his head.

"Theology should be given in homœopathic doses, and physic not at all. Touch their intellects through their affections. A dozen *preux chevaliers* would have rushed to the rescue just now, had the imagination of these poor creatures been a little cultivated.

Oh! blindness of theological teachers, who make star-gazers of the multitude, and heed not the scratches and bespatterings they get in stumbling over thorny places!"

The curate's house was now reached, a poetic-looking thatched house, covered with lovely roses, and having a delightfully old-fashioned and productive garden; fruitful it could not be called, since, what with the children and the blackbirds, cherries vanished when red on one side only, potatoes were pulled up when no bigger than walnuts, apple trees were stripped long before neighbouring orchards reached their fulness of red and crimson glory, a locust-like devastation going on all the year round.

At the click of the gate, a wild untidy little crew rushed out to greet Mrs. Minifie and her companions: Sammie, a sharp practical little man of seven; Sabina, commonly called Bina, a large-eyed, anxious-looking girl of six; Pennie, a rollicking monkey of five; and two other toddlers possessed of no strongly-developed characteristics, except a capacity for demolishing peppermints. All the curate's children had the curious look of mixed babyishness and precocity about them that is seen in young owls at that stage of their existence when they are all fluff, eyes, and beak. Sammie, Bina, and Pennie were mere babies as yet, but premature experience of the troubles of life had sharpened their little faces and given unnatural sharpness to their eyes.

"My!" cried Sammie, "Miss Meadowcourt is here, and has brought us cake, and you have brought us gingerbread; won't it be funny? Cake and gingerbread both in one day!"

And he put his hands in his pockets and danced before Mrs. Minifie ecstatically inquisitive. Bina tried to draw him away, whispering that such conduct was ungentlemanly. Pennie got her rosy mouth ready for a kiss, and seemed delighted at the prospect of so much company.

In the little breakfast-parlour opening on to the garden, sat Amy Greenfield, the curate's wife, with her baby in her lap, and Ingareth at her side, drinking tea.

"Naughty children," said Mrs. Greenfield, rising to greet her visitors, "to leave the tea-table when we have company! Bina and Sammie, take your bread and treacle to the window, and let Mrs. Minifie and the gentleman have your seats."

Bina obeyed, and having fetched clean cups, and wiped away crumbs and treacle drops with her little holland apron, motioned



"OH! NEVER MIND," GROANED THE CURATE, "GIVE ME SOME WATER."

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the new-comers to sit down. Ingaretha introduced her guest. Mrs. Greenfield, a pretty, careworn, young woman, who loved company, and often accused herself of wickedness because she could not feel reconciled to her pinched, noisy, hand-to-mouth life, felt at home with Monsieur Sylvestre in a moment. The baby—a most sociable baby—crowded and kicked and entertained the company with all her might; Mrs. Minifie did her part; Monsieur Sylvestre narrated all kinds of interesting things. Never had there been such a merry tea in the curate's squalid house. All on a sudden Mrs. Greenfield called out to Bina—

"Bina, I am sure papa must have come back from the village. Go and tell him we have visitors."

After a long time Bina came back, and creeping up to her mother, whispered loudly in her ear—

"Papa is come back, and papa is in the study; but he won't come in till they're gone, he says."

"Hush!" Amy said, blushing painfully, for she knew well enough why her husband would not come in. His clothes were threadbare and patched, and Sunday suits had been foregone luxuries for years past. As the talk grew more and more sparkling—for Monsieur Sylvestre never talked down to his audience, but rather lifted them into the airy heights and golden spheres in which his fancy dwelt both on working days and festivals—she blamed him for letting pride stand in the way of so much enjoyment. First, her visitor related a tragic, then a comic adventure, and at last stood up and recited moving passages from Alfred de Musset, Béranger, and the Socialist singers of modern France. Mrs. Minifie, whose French did not extend beyond the first dozen of the phrases in Murray's Traveller's Talk, wept copiously nevertheless. Ingaretha listened with a smile, having been let into the secret of her old friend's vanity long ago. Amy's eyes sparkled and cheeks glowed at the unwonted excitement. The children did not make much noise till all the cake was done. At last the party broke up, and then the curate emerged from his hiding-place, tired, impatient, parched with thirst. Pennie and one of the younger children ran up to him and caught hold of his hands.

"Oh! papa, we have had such a cake! But it's all gone; poor papa, to have no cake!"

He let go the sticky little fingers and sat down, looking ruefully at the besmeared deal

table, the blackened crust of the home-made loaf, sole remainder of the feast, the rows of little tin mugs, the teapot handle mended with string, the poverty-stricken aspect of everything.

"Bina, go and see if there is any milk left in the pail, and if not, ask Keziah to try and get a little more from the cow. There is some tea, though rather weak," Amy added, pouring out a cup of pale brown fluid, into which baby straightway mischievously thrust her little red foot, turning it over.

"Oh! never mind," groaned the curate. "Give me some water."

But Amy put the baby in his arms, poked up the kitchen fire, laid a few sticks between the bars, and by-and-by the kettle began to sing. She searched in the cupboards and found a loaf of bread and a fragment of butter. Bearing these and the kettle triumphantly to the dining-room, she sat down again.

"Miss Meadowcourt has invited us all to go to see her to-morrow," she said.

"Well, what of that?" asked the curate.

"Why should we not go? We are to have music—which you are very fond of," Amy answered soothingly.

"As well give tarts to starving beggars as music to us," the curate rejoined, in the same bitter tone. "Who wants a finer voice than your own? but from want of a piano you have forgotten how to sing. No, Amy, go to the rich people as much as you like, but don't ask me to go with you. I wasn't born to be a beggar, and I can't take up the *role* with a good grace now."

But Amy's heart was set upon going, and, of course, Amy had her way. The children shrieked at the bare notion of giving up the promised treat; the baby, as if leaguely with them, had a pathetic attack of spasms; the whole house echoed with juvenile weeping and wailing. No wonder that the curate, tired as he was, rushed out of doors. He had come home sick to death of the parish and parish work. It was only a shade less wearing than the kind of recreation to be had at home. He read to a couple of bed-ridden old women whose cottages happened to lie handy, then sat in a shady corner of the churchyard reading a stale *Times* the rector had lent him, till it grew dusk.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE RICH SENT EMPTY AWAY.

INGARETHA was certainly playing the democrat with a vengeance. She had said to herself in settling down at the Abbey that

she would dispense hospitality rather according to people's deserts than according to their expectations. The result of such a practice was to scandalize the few and to delight the many. That the mighty should be put down from their seat, in scriptural phrase, and the humble and meek exalted, though a simple interpretation enough, was quite out of keeping with the existing order of things, in other words, not to the taste of the mighty. So, when carriage after carriage deposited its burden of silk, feathers, and lace on Ingaretha's lawn, and she emerged from a shabby little group to do the honours, great was the discomfiture of the new-comers. For there was Madame Sylvestre in the broad-brimmed brown straw hat tied under the chin, and Monsieur Sylvestre in his almost Harlequin habiliments, and Mrs. Greenfield in a muslin gown not fit for a housemaid, and Bina and Sammie, of whose toilettes it could only be said that they were for once clean. What cared they, happy little souls, whether they were tatterdemalion or no? Childhood is essentially communistic. "Voir, c'est avoir," sings Béranger. This smooth lawn, the sumptuously-spread tea-table, these tame swans, and glades, and aviaries seemed as much their property as Ingaretha's. Hand in hand they explored, prattled, moralised, and, like sly little birds, plucked a flower or strawberry when they found themselves unheeded. The kind lady who possessed such beautiful things, and lavished her beautiful things on others, was like a fairy godmother to the poor curate's little ones.

"I say, Bina," said Sammie confidentially, "when I am big, and wear a coat, would Miss Meadowcourt marry me, do you think? Wouldn't it be nice to be here every day?"

Bina thought and thought.

"No, Sammie dear," she said authoritatively, "Miss Meadowcourt wouldn't marry you because you make too much noise, and delight in teasing the poor frogs. And then, how you run up and down-stairs with your dirty boots on! I am sure Miss Meadowcourt would never put up with that."

"But how nice it would be! Just look at that cherry tree, and Miss Meadowcourt has dozens. Don't I wish I were a blackbird."

"And never learn any catechism? Fie," retorted Bina. "You may well repeat the text about the heathen imagining a vain thing. If we were blackbirds we should not have such dear babies to play with."

"And no screaming though," cried Sammie, putting his hands in his pockets, and rattling his marbles. "That would be jolly!"

The little people thought a summer day had never before been so long, so beautiful, and so happy. There were places to play in without number; there was a kind and ingenious young gardener—as good as a page in a fairy tale—who contrived swings, seesaws, and other delights for them. There was a pretty little colt, and a pair of sweet-tempered, silky-coated grey donkeys, and wonderful peacocks. And when they had seen all this, there yet remained a long time before going home!

A child's blissful day—who can describe its sports, its romance, its abounding never-to-be-forgotten exhilarations? Well would it be for us if we could retain your magnifying powers, oh, wise, childish hearts! Their joys, like little stars viewed through a telescope, turn suddenly into big round moons; filmy tracks of light become, as if by magic, stately phalanxes of silvery orbs; and the big moons and phalanxes are remembered only, and not the little stars and filmy tracks. Bina and Sammie felt themselves transformed into the hero and heroine of a story-book. Young as they were, they had experienced hardships enough, and to be fêted was as novel to them as it was delightful. Here, at least, Ingaretha's policy of feasting Lazarus and letting Dives starve, answered admirably.

Meantime, mixed tragedy and comedy were being acted on the lawn. Carew, after trying vainly to get ten minutes' *elle-d'elle* with his hostess—was ever hostess so bewitching as the lady of the Abbey to-day with her golden hair and dress of the colour of a wild hyacinth—took Madame Sylvestre into his confidence.

"I am going abroad in a week or two," he said, speaking French. "I give up happiness as a bad job," and then he laughed bitterly at his brutal way of putting it. "She values my love about as much as she values the friendship of these people." He inclined his head scornfully towards the crowd and went on,—“Oh, madame, you are my best friend, and hers too. Don't let her get into trouble. I would stay near her, but I cannot. I am eating my heart out."

Madame Sylvestre looked at him wistfully with her large, unspeakably pathetic brown eyes. There was no need for her to say how much she suffered with and for him, and how gladly she would have taken his sorrow upon her own shoulders, had that been possible. This is the secret of real sympathy. He who would suffer for us, loves us indeed. "Wait for a happy chance, dear friend," she said tenderly. "I think it will come in time."

He shook his head.

"Nay, we have had happy chances enough! Have we not travelled together, undergone hardships, even dangers, together; seen, as it were, new worlds in each other's company? Are you quite sure she does not care a little for our good comrade René? She was always twice as kind to him as to me."

"Oh, impossible, monsieur. René is an angel but as poor as a church mouse, and Mademoiselle Ingaretha is a rich lady. It would be like a princess marrying a beggar."

"Before the summer is out he will be here."

"All the more reason why you should stay," Madame Sylvestre answered, with womanly insinuation. "I love René as if he were my own son, but he must not marry Ingaretha. I wish my husband would advise him to stay away from England on that account."

Then, after some further talk about Carew's love-affair, they discussed Monsieur Sylvestre's plans.

"Tell me," asked Madame Sylvestre



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eagerly, "may we expect two harvests a year here as in our beautiful Algérie?"

"Dear madame," Carew answered, "I fear not; but why disquiet yourself about the future? You know that anything I have is entirely at your service?"

"How can we so abuse the goodness of our friends! But to go back to the farming. If our kind Ingaretha lends us the money to take it with, could we repay the loan in a year's time?"

"Of farming I know less than you do, madame. Of one thing, however, I can assure you. There is another person who will joyfully

replace or repay your loan, whatever the crops may be."

He had been turning the matter of his promise to Ingaretha over in his mind, and could hit upon no better way of fulfilling it than this. Yet no sooner were the words spoken, calling up a look of pain into Madame Sylvestre's face, than he wished them unsaid, and blamed himself for such an off-hand, indolent way of doing kindnesses. How differently would Ingaretha have put it!

"And there is another thing that makes me anxious," pursued the Frenchwoman, after thanking him painfully. "My husband will

never rest till he is again concerting some Socialist scheme or other, and how can he do that without compromising our kind protectors? Alas! my heart sinks within me when I contemplate the trouble we may bring upon you and upon her."

"For myself," Carew said soothingly, "I am utterly indifferent to the terror of being compromised, and I know Ingaretha—Miss Meadowcourt—would feel that she suffered in a good cause. If she cared for me half as much as she cares for Monsieur Sylvestre and Socialism, I should esteem myself happy indeed."

"It is true that she loves him dearly, and has the most enlightened ideas; but I look backwards and forwards in doubt and dismay. Can you wonder at it, knowing what you do?"

Just then an acquaintance of Mr. Carew's came up, and the *tête-à-tête* was at an end. She retired into a quiet corner looking very sad. Of a proud spirit was Madame Sylvestre, and to live upon the perpetual providence of affection seemed unendurable to her. Was the beautiful level friendship of equals she so coveted a Utopian dream, never to be fulfilled?

How she envied her husband's happy unconcern! Whether his cruse of oil and his measure of meal were replenished by a miracle or by friendly hands, troubled him as little as the scantiness of both. There he stood in the midst of a group of new admirers, eyes sparkling, cheeks flushed, head erect, charming the dull people of St. Beowulf's as easily and naturally as he had charmed his enthusiastic followers in the land of exile. What a noble figure was his, in spite of the threadbare habiliments! Among all present none had so fine a bearing as he; and the poor woman accused herself for having reproached him, however meekly, the minute before. Did not that very inconsequence of character go far to make it the sweet and guileless and bewitching thing it was? She wiped away tears of thankfulness at seeing him so happy. After all, what mattered her own poor pride—pride forsooth!—and she a woman whose best years of life had been spent in idolizing this man! For his sake she might surely eat uncomplainingly of the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

During long years of out-door toil she had acquired a habit of dropping asleep whenever she found herself in a quiet place, and the summer-house to which she had retired being screened from the gay lawn by a laurel hedge, she was soon dreaming like a child. The

life of the last few weeks faded from her vision as coast-land from hastening sail. Once more she was in beautiful, treacherous Algérie. Once more she breathed the thyme-scented air of the Metidja, and gazed on the golden and purple hills. Under the burning sun of the south, she toiled and rested with friendly fellow-workers. There was René, the beautiful, the beloved, the eloquent, whose words, sweeter than honey and stronger than fire, intoxicated and inflamed the hearts of all listeners; there was his boon friend and adopted brother, Maddio, the ugly, the gay, the child at heart and the lover and teacher of little children. There was Blaise, whom they thought dead—the melancholy, tender-hearted, spiritual Blaise; and all were happy, for famine and pestilence and earthquake had not come. She murmured in her sleep as these visions flitted by, and half-woke herself once or twice. At last she was aroused in earnest. A familiar voice sounded in her ear, a well-known hand was laid on her arm. Looking up, she found herself between the two she had just seen in her dreams, René and Maddio, and Ingaretha between, smiling, held a hand of each.

Madame Sylvestre rose with outstretched hands and swimming eyes. The younger man kissed her hand. The elder saluted her, brother-like, on the cheek; then a volley of questions and answers ensued. Whence had they come? Where were they housed? How was this friend and that? Was René quite cured of his fever, and Maddio of his rheumatism? For a little Ingaretha left them. How Ingaretha's guests stared and tittered at the odd appearance of the newcomers may be easily imagined. The advent of Monsieur and Madame Sylvestre had seemed queer enough, but the new apparitions were infinitely queerer. He whom they called Maddio, for instance, with his white cotton blouse, broad-brimmed straw hat, loose *pantalons*, and round close-shorn head, was ever such a figure of fun? Surely, a runaway from some madhouse, said one or two, and punned mercilessly upon the poor man's name. The younger and less peculiar looking of the two might possibly be in his senses, since his clothes were more after the fashion of other people; but he was evidently as veritable a gipsy as the rest. He was, without doubt, extremely handsome, the ladies said, though not nearly tall enough. What a beautiful brown skin! What bewitching dark eyes! What glossy curls! What a fine expression! Was he some foreign lover of Miss Meadowcourt's?

When the newly-arrived pair emerged from the summer-house Ingaretha begged leave to introduce them to one or two of her friends. Signor Maddio, she said, was a distinguished naturalist, and a traveller over all parts of the world. Monsieur René was an author, and also a great lover and student of nature. Both, like Monsieur Sylvestre, were political exiles. Certainly Maddio and René proved themselves adepts in the art of making themselves agreeable. St. Beowulf taste and St. Beowulf propriety were shocked, though St. Beowulf inquisitiveness was fairly aroused. People stayed and stayed till they could learn nothing more of the bewitching vagabonds the lady of the Abbey delighted to honour, then returned home wondering what would happen in the way of scandal next. One thing seemed pretty certain—that if Ingaretha pursued this reckless system of hospitality they should have to stay away from her house altogether. There were some eccentricities flesh and blood could not stand, and to be invited to meet not only the curate's tatterdemalion wife and dirty children, but a host of tag-rag-and-bob-tail political exiles, was one of these. The very name of exile had something disreputable and portentous in the sound of it, suggesting Lord George Gordon No Popery riots, Smith O'Brien and cabbage-beds, &c.

"The truth is, my dear," said Mr. Stapleton, an old country magistrate, to his wife as they drove home, "it all comes of poor Meadowcourt taking his wife to hear the corn-law debates a few weeks before Ingaretha was born. I told him what would happen."

"I suppose Mr. Meadowcourt was what you gentlemen call a Radical," asked meek Mrs. Stapleton.

"A red republican. That's what he was; and but for that, as good a fellow as ever sat in the House," growled Mr. Stapleton, and the growl was followed by a snore.

"Mamma," demanded the youngest Miss Stapleton, who thought it would be as well to get up a little knowledge of politics before having another conversation with that delightful Monsieur René, "who are Radicals?"

"The people who read penny papers, don't believe in eternal punishment, and wear wideawake hats, I believe; but ask your papa. Thank God I was never brought up to have opiions," answered Mrs. Stapleton. But Miss Stapleton made no further inquiry about Radicals.

Perhaps the rector was more disconcerted than anybody. That very night he selected four tracts; one for Madame Syl-

vestre, one for her husband, and one for each of the new-comers. Things had transpired in the course of the afternoon that convinced him it was high time to bestir himself. Was not this democratic spirit like the leaven that leaveneth the whole lump? Good heavens, what words he had that afternoon heard! Socialism, fraternity, equality! His hair stood on end.

CHAPTER IX.—A SOCIALIST'S CONFESSION.

RENE and Maddio, lodged humbly at the village ratcatcher's, esteemed themselves happy as kings. They were accustomed to privation, had lain hard and fared scantily all the days of their lives, had endured heat and cold, hunger and thirst, ungrateful toil and ill-repaid long-suffering. To find themselves free from care in this rich lordly England, within reach of their beloved master and teacher, Monsieur Sylvestre, and their adored mistress, Ingaretha, for the present seemed enough. Both were ardent disciples of the one and faithful worshippers of the other. Monsieur Sylvestre's eloquence and Ingaretha's beauty made life a happy thing and the world a desirable place to them under any circumstances. They looked neither backwards nor forwards, but accepted the pleasant Capua, dreaming, adoring, enjoying.

At early dawn Maddio would be up and stirring, and after a hearty breakfast of dry bread and coffee, each went his own way: Maddio, satchel on shoulder, would start on a botanising expedition; René, after dawdling among his books and papers till the sun was high, would also set out on a voyage of discovery, his pockets full of *brochures* and memorandum books. There was plenty to enchant both; rustic scenes with which Constable and Gainsborough have familiarized us, pastoral life set to music by Blomfield and Crabbe. How René delighted in the low fragrant meadows; the little rivers running amid silvery-leaved willows and tangles of forget-me-not; in the large brown ponds, haunt of water-hen and king-fisher; in the corn-fields ripening into reddish gold; above all, in the stately parks! He would sit for hours under the shade, watching the fawns at play or making acquaintance with the large-eyed, lustrous cattle cropping the luxuriant grass; or he would lie on his back and, shutting his eyes, dream some reformer's dream, half hearing the notes of thrush and stock-dove. Sometimes Ingaretha chanced to come that way, and her golden hair and white dress were sure to be heralded by a prophetic joy in his heart. He always felt

her presence before she was near, and she saw it and knew it, in spite of his well-acted comradeship and frank, boyish homage. Before the eyes of the world she was his patroness, his "sovereign lady the queen," his benefactor and friend; nothing more. When they found themselves alone, there was an end of etiquette and forced reticence. René, ever inclined to moods of sudden gaiety and sudden gloom, became inspired with all kinds of fancies, would sing, recite poems, dance, commit a hundred playful and unexpected vagaries; or he would pour out the sad experience of his chequered, unfortunate life, kindling into poetic fervour under the influence of her sympathy.

One day, when she had come upon him so suddenly that there was no time to prepare himself for that exquisite presence, she found big tears streaming down his pale cheeks. He smiled whilst wiping them away, said something about the caprices of an enthusiast, and began to talk of other matters. But after a few forced phrases he burst out on a sudden,—

"Don't accuse me of brutal ingratitude if when I am happiest I wish I were dead. But I see nothing at the end of my happiness—except misery. There you have it. I have no more to say. To-day I possess all and more than I want; yesterday I had nothing; to-morrow I should like to go to sleep—and you know the rest."

She reminded him of her friendship, past, present, and to come. She knew what it was to lose friends that way, and begged him not to "take the name of Death in vain." This she said solemnly and appealingly.

"Well, have it as you like. I would live a hundred years to please you, as you know well enough—ay, a hundred years like the thirty I am familiar with, and they have not been all delicious. To want bread is not much; to be a social pariah from childhood very little; blows, kicks, and bruises also go to be forgotten at ten years of age; but there are unforgetable things that happened as early as that not so easy to forget. The miserable consciousness of being born into a world without being wanted, and without being able to get out of it; the heathenish—I might say fiendish—jealousy of the children who wear satin shoes and eat tarts; the insupportable necessity of having to do battle with society, begging, pillaging—don't blush, sweetest lady, I never quite descended to that—the devilish rage induced even in a young heart by hunger and thirst and cold. Oh, I pray to Heaven to forget all this, and Heaven does not grant my prayer. Intercede for me with

those powers which are said to be merciful."

He covered his face with his hands and wept again. She wept with him, and that was all.

"Don't you see the consequence of all this early suffering?" he asked after a time. "It turns men into Christians without Godhead; into martyrs without sanctity. I can't help or save my fellow-men, but I don't forget for an hour how they suffer. Amid all this happiness it is present with me. Hundreds and hundreds of thousands of unfortunates find no Ingaretha to pick them out of dirt."

"We were both mere children," he continued, breaking ever and anon into rapturous smiles, "when you found me out in Rome. If ever subject offered itself to a painter, it was that of the golden-haired, rosy-cheeked, white-robed English girl and the bare-footed, squalid, care-browed beggar-boy, who made a childish compact of friendship on the steps of St. Peter. Then were the much-abused names of equality and fraternity hallowed indeed! I have believed in a God and good spirits since that hour."

She caught up his narrative, eagerly, proudly,—

"Don't call yourself a beggar-boy. Were you not a genius, and is not genius royal always? How pleased was my dear father to recognise your great gifts! How good and tractable you were! And, ah! what days we had together the next spring, at Frascati—on the Pincian—in the Borghese Gardens! How the flowers smell in Italy! How the air caresses! Again and again I have dreamed that I was poor and a wanderer, and that we were roaming about the streets of Rome together."

"Would that the dream were true!" he said; adding immediately after, "Forgive me. I often know not what I say!"

"Would that it were!" she said, bending her head low; and he saw, in spite of the shadow of her broad-brimmed straw hat, how pale she was, how sad, how moved.

"Is that so?" he asked.

"You feel it, you read it in my face, or you would think so badly of me that you would never cross my threshold again. I love the same things you love. I cannot have them here, and I dare not go away. I must fulfil the duties my father bequeathed me. To live out of England"—with you was on her lips; but she blushed scarlet, and checked the unbidden words—"would be to let this beautiful place go to ruins, and its

owners be represented by such men as Mr. Minifie. You don't yet know how much I have to do here nor what faith my father had in me—my dear, dear father——”

Tears stopped her from saying more; and he, forgetting everything but concern for her distress, brought out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped away her tears ere they fell.

“What is the use of crying?” she said at last, holding out her hands to him with a sad smile. “We cannot make things right. I must go my ways, and you yours, content to see each other and help each other sometimes.”

“That is not making things right!” he answered very bitterly.

“Then tell me what to do. I want all the world to be happy, and you and your poor Ingaretha too.”

“Do you love me a little, then?” he asked.

“Have I not loved you a good deal for ten years?” she said, smiling through her tears.

“Oh! I know but too well that I was in purgatory, and that you were the angel who came to me from heaven. For the first time when I asked for bread, I got no stones, and this went on for years; hungry, you fed me; forsaken, you cared for me; homeless, you housed me. And the end is, the bitterest ingratitude that ever turned the heart of man into a hell!”

She looked up in wonder and dismay, and touched his arm with her hand—that exquisite hand he rejoiced to have in sight at all times. But he took no heed. Head bowed down, eyes fixed on the ground, he went on—

“How can it be otherwise? Your angelic goodness stands up as a barrier between us two. I can't forget that I am a man, and your lover in the sight of Heaven, and an outcast, and your *protégé*, hanger-on—call it what you will—in the sight of man. Have you not loved me a good deal for ten years, you say? ay, and you could go on loving me for ten years longer in the same fashion; but what kind of love is that? You are willing to give all and receive nothing. Oh, Equality! what sins are committed in thy name! Here is a man who loves a woman, and a woman who, according to her own showing, loves a man, and calls him her equal. Yet she is content to play the part of Providence to him all his life, as if love lived by bread alone!”

He laughed bitterly.

“Am I content?” she asked, humbly and sorrowfully. “You forget what I said just

now. I shrink sometimes from the sacrifice I have imposed upon myself. I know that a happier lot might have been mine”—tears rose to her eyes, a flush to her cheeks, and her voice faltered, as she added—“with you.”

Seeing that he had no word to say, she went on in a still more appealing voice—

“Life is difficult to women: you don't know how difficult it is. It seems to me that when we try hardest to do right, we get most blamed. I care more for you, dear René, than for anybody else in the wide world. All that I have done for you has been done for dear love's sake. How can I make you believe it?”

He made no answer, and did not change his rigid attitude. He seemed to see nothing but a small blue butterfly that had alighted on a blade of grass at his feet.

“Won't you believe me?” she said coaxingly, as if he were a child, and she the tenderest mother God and the angels ever compassionated. “Oh! you must believe me!” and then, childishly compassionate, hardly knowing what she did, so overwhelmed was she with the sense of his long-suffering, she stooped low, and kissed him on the forehead. What a sight was that for the wood-sprites and oreads! She, rosy-red, golden-haired, blue-eyed, sweet and serious, as fair a woman as the sun shone on that summer day; he, with his bronzed skin, dark curls, delicate throat, and large sad eyes, beautiful enough to be a god, but a god of sorrow and not of love! The impassioned nightingales might well accompany such a love-poem; and the clouds that hid the sun on a sudden, and made the beech-grove a solemn place, was surely in league with the tragedy of those two hearts.

“And even a kiss cannot make things right,” he said, holding both her hands, and looking into her eyes with inexpressible emotion. “The world is too unhappy to be so healed, Ingaretha. You and I might rejoice in each other, and leave the rest—if we could get rid of our souls. We can't do that. We can't forget the work we have to do, which leads us as far apart as the east is from the west.”

“If we could only work together!” she said, crying bitterly.

“How might that be? Am I not a son of the people, a Socialist, moreover, which means an enemy of your class, an iconoclast of your household gods? You have noble ideals. Cherish them, embody them, glorify them, with what strength you may;

you cannot join hands with me and mine. The time is coming when such things shall be. The signs are at hand for those to read who run; but I cannot sacrifice you. I cannot stand by and see you sacrificed. Let me go, then, and keep for ever the fond dreams I have dreamed of late. Oh! the happy, happy days! I did not know what a queen you were till I came to England, and saw you in your father's house. Hold me in your heart for a day, and then forget that such a person as René ever lived and suffered!"

What could she say? What could she do? All the abounding tenderness of her nature and all the experiences of her young life pleaded for him. Sitting by his side that summer day, she almost wished that this favoured lot, this princessdom and inherited prosperity were but a dream, or would melt like a dream, and that she, with René, had no portion beyond love and youth. For a long time they were silent, he growing sadder and sadder, she more and more pitiful. At length some stray word or look of hers—one never knows how these things happen—turned the tide of his dreary thoughts. Hope and joy, like sunshine rippling on waves, coloured his inner vision. He laughed, sang, dreamed. The park became again an enchanted place, and life wore a friendly face.

CHAPTER X.—WHAT SHALL SHE DO WITH IT?

POOR Ingaretha grew sadly puzzled to know what she should do with it. These beloved and bewitching friends of hers had one fault which they showed pretty equally. They were as unpractical people as you would find if you searched the four quarters of the globe in that especial quest. Certainly they had experienced more ups and downs than fall to the lot of most of us; had tasted ingratitude, treachery, persecution, triumph; also, short-lived prosperity, and the fame of the world. But the only effect of all this teaching was to make them more childishly confident in unexpected providences, and more unfit to deal with rugged realities. They could never believe ill of their fellow-creatures, and accused a malevolent chance or pernicious law whenever harm had come to them through the medium of personal enemies. But their trustfulness went even further than this. To think well of one's fellow-creatures is an excellent specific against premature age, crabbed temper, and bodily disorders; but to think so well of the existing order of things as to take no thought for the morrow, is to rub the Lamp of Evil, and

summon not one but a thousand ministering slaves thereof. Ingaretha knew well enough that her friends were all capable of gaining their bread, and one of them, Madame Sylvestre, capable of gaining her butter also. She knew well enough that they never had gained it, and never would gain it, and were too proud to partake of her abundance. Could she stand by and see them starve in the midst of it?

She thought the matter over night and day, bringing her small experience and large generosity to bear upon it. Innumerable difficulties stood in the way of any plan. There was Madame Sylvestre's pride to contend with, and Mr. Minifie's niggardly officiousness; Monsieur Sylvestre's idealism, and Maddio's hopeless contentment; lastly, there was René's sorrowful passion, and Carew's cavalierly love. Never, surely, was a lady more overburdened with cares and perplexities! Of course the simplest solution of the difficulty was to hire a farm for Monsieur Sylvestre, and to marry Mr. Carew. But then there was no farm to be had for love or money, and she had not the slightest inclination to marry Mr. Carew. With regard to the first, it was a case of "Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink." She had land in plenty, and Mr. Carew had land in plenty, but the one being a woman and the other a poet, both were at the mercy of their steward, who could not be called unjust, but was certainly narrow. Mr. Carew was ten times more in awe of Mr. Minifie than Ingaretha, and was utterly wanting in her keen interest in practical matters. To him she knew she must not look for help, and if not to Carew, to whom?

Good angels go about the world in strange disguises, and as luck would have it, Mrs. Minifie, from the date of that romantic adventure before described, had pledged herself to befriend Monsieur Sylvestre and to circumvent Mr. Minifie. The opportunity lay at hand, tempting as ripe strawberry to five-year old truants in forbidden Edens. The choice little farm of seventy acres before mentioned was to be sold, and Mr. Minifie, in spite of his promises to Ingaretha, was secretly negotiating for the purchase of it for himself. Was ever such an adopted son of the father of wiles? Mrs. Minifie did not stop to think over the subject, and weigh her duties to her husband in one scale and her duties to pleasant people in the other, but determined to pay him in his own coin.

Accordingly, she appeared at the Abbey one morning, and begged to see Miss Mra-

dowcourt for a few minutes on business. The two betook themselves to the library, Ingaretha's blue eyes twinkling with amusement. For the large flexible person of Mrs. Minifie floundered hither and thither like a seal in mud, or a balloon without ballast. It seemed hard to believe that she had any centre of gravity, and that the levers, pulleys, and pivot-joints of her anatomical system had ever been in working order. That nature indeed had made an exception in her case seemed the likeliest conclusion, giving her, as to the jelly-fish and oysters, merely a rudimentary organization. When at last she was fairly settled—for the act of falling upon the first surface of support that offers, and there sticking, can hardly be called sitting down—the mystery exploded.

"Oh! my dear Miss Meadowcourt, pray thank Heaven you have not a husband. I assure you, the baseness of the male sex makes my hair stand on end without a moment's notice. There's Mr. Minifie trying to buy the very farm you want for your friends. Pilgrim's Hatch, in the parish of Hoo-cum-Hessett—you know it, I daresay—seventy acres of capital land, and a snug little house."

"Oh, I remember Pilgrim's Hatch quite well," answered Ingaretha, brightening. "I have ridden there many a time. Is it really to be had?"

"You may well ask that, for it seems just the sort of thing that is too good to be true. But for the first time in my life I am in luck, and Mr. Minifie will be caught like a fox in his own trap. Ah, what a consolation it will be on my dying bed to think that I have for once cheated Mr. Minifie of a few hundred pounds—a hundred shillings would be something! Well, will you put on your hat at once, and drive with me to Pilgrim's Hatch?"

Ingaretha hesitated.

"Dear me," Mrs. Minifie cried, "you don't mean to say that you can hesitate—and with such a decided kind of a name too! I'm sure Shakespeare was wrong about names, and that a rose wouldn't be a rose if it were called a thistle! I think my own name will drive me mad sometimes. Janey this, Janey that, Mr. Minifie calls all day long till I feel ready to run away. It is cruel of parents to christen their children without conscience, and if mine had called me Helen or Ethelinda I might have been a happy woman. But you will go to Pilgrim's Hatch, won't you?"

Ingaretha ventured to suggest the desirability of a straightforward course. She would prefer, for many reasons, to speak openly to

Mr. Minifie, even at the risk of a misunderstanding, as she doubted her business capacities too much to enter into negotiations of her own accord.

"Don't think I like double-dealing, my dear. I beg pardon, my dear young lady, I meant to say. I detest it as much as you do, but what good ever came of plain-dealing with a fox? You lose twice as many chickens, and don't make him a bit more respectable. Now if ever a man was an adept in the art of trickery, it is Mr. Minifie. By little and little, he has got every bit of property out of my hands, till I am often without a shilling in my pocket for weeks at a time; and before I was married, my two sisters and myself had just upon a thousand a year among us to spend as we liked. That comes of having to do with men, or anything else you don't understand. But pray make your mind easy about getting the farm away from him. I assure you Mr. Minifie is worried to death by being over-rich already. His low spirits are frightful sometimes. I believe the end of it will be suicide."

"I always look upon Mr. Minifie as a particularly cheerful person," Ingaretha said.

"Oh yes, he knows how to deceive good people. Bad spirits mean something sinister, and in a money-getting man look suspicious. So he whistles wherever he goes as gay as a lark, and keeps his gloomy fits for my benefit. But do go to Pilgrim's Hatch with me, and get it for Monsieur Sylvestre. It is a case of Now or Never when Mr. Minifie has a finger in the pie."

And Ingaretha, who cordially detested her land-steward, and whose healthy young appetite was whetted for a little downright fun, at last consented to go.

The two ladies set off in Mrs. Minifie's lumbering old vehicle, and drove at a snail's pace, sometimes through winding lanes, now one vast tangle of wild clematis and honeysuckle, and sometimes alongside broad golden pastures, amid which wound Ingaretha's little river, the Thet, purling musically and turning mill-wheels here and there. Under the shadow of beech and elm were gathered the shining red, meek-eyed cows, and little lambs, all as like each other as twins, frisked at the heels of proud and happy dams.

By-and-by they crossed a common, glowing with gorse, sweetly-scented, and alive with shrill-voiced rook and happy lark. A few hundred yards of lane brought them to as pretty a farm as the neighbourhood of St. Beowulf could show. It was neither exactly romantic nor picturesque, but lacking

that quality, had every other dear to the heart of a farmer or lover of rural life. The house was small and compact, and stood in the midst of gardens, orchards, stack-yards, and stables. At the back was a large meadow and a pond overgrown with bulrushes; on either side rose gentle sweeps of corn-land and root-crops. That good farming had been the order of the day one saw at a glance. Pigs of the best breed, long in the barrel, shiny-black, small in the extremities, short-nouted, short-eared, scuttled away from the carriage-wheels; dark-red cows, of the stock dear to Suffolk farmers, polled, neat, and glossy, grazed under the apple trees, almost knee-deep in the grass. The corn was thick and clean, and showing the ear. The clover in bloom was heavy; hoers were busy among the beetroot and swede turnips; the hedges were well kept, and not a square yard of foul land was to be seen anywhere. A couple of stacks of bright copperish Talavera wheat stood in the shed, and it was the last week in June — always a sign of prosperity. Hens with broods of plump chicks clucked about the farm-yard. A pretty little carrot-coloured colt sported with its mother in a small inclosure. All betokened peace and plenty. Ingaretha's heart bounded at the thought of her dear old friends being fairly settled here for the rest of their days. Surely this was an Eden indeed,—not an Eden of ideas, but of reality.

They were shown into a neat little keeping-room, as the best parlour is called in Suffolk, and after waiting some time, Mr. Moyse, the owner and occupier, came in, blushing crimson at having to encounter two ladies, and especially the young and handsome lady. Mrs. Minifie, who never kept her own counsel, blurting out domestic details in and out of season, rushed at once *in medias res*; Ingaretha trying as vainly to hold her back as a steady little lad who does his best to feel the mouth of some strong and frisky two-year-old colt.

"Of course you must please yourself, Mr. Moyse," she went on; "but if I had to choose between Mr. Minifie and Miss Meadowcourt, to do business with, I should no more deliberate than a child between a big cake and a little cake. Here she is, offering to pay you a good price, and you know that her money is quite as good if not better than Mr. Minifie's. What on earth are you waiting for? Do you think the angel Gabriel will come down and bid for it next? or who? For my part, when anybody says Snap, I say Snap, and strike a good bargain with the first willing—"

"But we must go into particulars," In-

garetha said; "Mr. Moyse knows well enough that I wish to pay a fair price for the farm, and that, as I especially want it, I should esteem it a favour to have the first bid."

Mr. Moyse scratched his head, blushed, and at last got out a sentence.

"What if I go to your lawyer, Mr. Mede, about it?" he said, feeling utterly incompetent to treat with a tall, elegant young lady, who spoke beautifully and wore a white muslin dress on working days!

"To speak the honest truth," Ingaretha answered, "Mr. Mede strongly disapproves of purchasing land."

"That's awkward," the farmer said.

"One man is just as like another as two peas in a pod," Mrs. Minifie broke in warmly. "Mammon, Mammon, Mammon! they sell their souls to filthy lucre, and set women a-praying for them! You are afraid we shall be too sharp for you, Mr. Moyse, is that it?"

"It isn't that. I don't want more than two shillings and sixpence-halfpenny for my half-crown, but it's a queer concern to do business with ladies. Leastways, I'm not used to it."

"If Miss Meadowcourt doesn't understand farming, I do," Mrs. Minifie said. "Come, what do you want for stock, crop, and valuation?"

"No, no, Mrs. Minifie. I can't play pitch-halfpenny with those who don't know heads and tails when they see 'em. Miss Meadowcourt is welcome to the farm, but I must talk to Mr. Mede or some one in breeches about it. That's my meaning, shell and husk and kernel."

Ingaretha smiled and reflected a moment.

"Perhaps you are right. I will ride to St. Beowulf's to-morrow morning, and will get Mr. Mede to make an appointment with you. But may I count upon the farm?" she added insinuatingly.

"I never reckon on a calf myself till I've seen it with my own eyes; but others do, and the calves come all right. That's as you please, Miss Meadowcourt."

"In any case, you will keep your own counsel till the matter is settled for once and for all?"

"My own what?"

"You will not mention the matter to any one meantime. Mr. Mede must, in fact shall," she added, smiling, "be persuaded to do as I wish."

"Mum's the word with me, whether I'm buying or selling; and a safe one, I take it," Mr. Moyse said, growing more at ease as he saw the ladies rise to go. "Will you like to

take a look round?" he went so far as to say.

Mrs. Minifie would fain have peered into every nook and cranny, but Ingaretha preferred to wait. They took their leave, and proceeded homeward in high spirits, the elder lady descanting on the ignoble bearing of the stronger towards the weaker sex.

"Just take such a man as Mr. Moyse or my husband—or, to go a step lower, Jabez, my coachman. Now, there isn't one of the three who doesn't look down upon a woman as a fool, and treat her worse than a man simply because she is a woman. It's like boys and cockchafers, they tease 'em, and stick 'em through with pins, and tear off their wings, for no better reason than that God made 'em cockchafers."

"Oh! Mrs. Minifie, I hope we are not going to have our wings torn off."

"I'm so old that I forget the time when I had any. But you are young, and, oh, how pretty! I wish you had a mother to take care of you, my dear."

And Mrs. Minifie took hold of Ingaretha's hand with a rough tenderness that touched her.

"I never knew my mother; but my father was an angel to me," she said; "life was very easy then."

"You must marry and shift your responsibilities on a man's shoulders. Husbands are bad enough, but the cares of single life are worse. The world marries you to Mr. Carew."

"That is a very old story," Ingaretha said, a little affronted.

"Well—I marry you to a very different person!" Mrs. Minifie added silyly.

Ingaretha blushed crimson, and changed the subject.



PART III.

CHAPTER XL.—RED-LETTER DAYS.



THE drama of life, like the drama of history, has interregnums, brief, beatifying intervals of peace, during which the blood-stained hoof-marks of the despoiler are effaced by merciful showers, and the trampled flowers of Hope and Faith blossom afresh.

Then are laid to rest the passions that consume and the griefs that turn bread into bitterness and wine into gall; then the convictions that made war one upon the other seem unveiled; and endeavour and purpose and the high aspirations that were dimmed for awhile, shine out bright and clear like stars swept by a rain-gust. Wounds are healed, gaps are filled up, plenteous harvests are reaped and garnered in the sunshine.

Wonderful indeed is the craving for happiness in the great, sad, wistful heart of humanity beating throughout the universe! Wonderful is its capacity for appropriating it! A day ago, it hardly seems so long, we were weeping tears of agony in some dread Gethsemane, apparently forgotten by God and all good angels. To-day, the sky is clear, we move in golden air, happy voices sing to us, happy sights enchant us; we are like the shepherd boy in Arcadia, 'piping as if he should never be old.' Heaven is kind to give us such short memories in our good days. We forget ourselves—oh! coveted Lethæan gift—that is, our sorrowing, regretting, sinning selves, conscious only of souls that aspire and hearts that are satisfied.

Few people could be found who had suffered more than Monsieur Sylvestre, Euphrosyne, René, and Maddio. To tell their lives properly, one should be able to write tragedy. Of course the woman had suffered

most, being a woman; but the others had not lain on beds of roses. Having let René speak for himself, the others may keep silence for a time. They had known what it was to be, like St. Paul, 'in perils of robbers, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.' But here, in this lovely, fruitful England, the misery had vanished at the touch of their golden-haired fairy Ingaretha, and they suffered themselves to follow whithersoever her wand guided.

What a summer they spent together! First came July with its short bright nights and long glowing days, its overpowering sweetness of rose and jasmine and honeysuckle, its warm shadows, its burning noontides. They often made holiday from morning till night, and never grew tired of each other's company. When a cool breeze was blowing, Maddio and Ingaretha would go on a botanizing excursion, sometimes lasting an hour, sometimes a day. He was the pleasantest companion in the world, overflowing with childlike spirits and hopefulness, and capable of enjoying abundantly. Side by side they walked or rode—Maddio only ventured to mount one of the gardener's donkeys, being no equestrian—through the cool sweet-scented lanes, he telling her of former adventures in beautiful, far-off Algérie, playful, and serious by turns, she always sympathetic. They would make an excursion to the friendly, thriving old town of Ipswich, and from thence ascend the Orwell to Harwich, a pleasant sail for a summer day. The river is clear and bright, the banks are green and softly undulated; Wolsey's tower rises statelily from amid the wooded bluffs of Freston. At the river's mouth lie anchored men-of-war and noble ships, and picturesque fishing-craft. Or they would go farther still and reach the ever-freshening, ever-turbulent, northern sea, to Aldborough, quiet birthplace of a quiet poet; or to Lowestoft lying at the foot of glorious heaths, solitary even in these days of railroads, broken, wild, blowy. Is the air of the desert fresher or more vivifying than the breaths blown there? It is hard to say.

Certainly the pleasure of existence, for existence' sake, is fully tasted by those who, mounting purple heights, knee-deep in gorse and heather, lose themselves on the common, having the sea in sight always, now steely-grey, now silvery-bright, now green as malachite,

now deepest violet, a dozen pictures in an hour.

They made a pilgrimage to Constable's birthplace, and what a revelation of grace and tranquil loveliness fell to their share then! From the dull little town of Manningtree you drive for half-an-hour along dusty roads till you come to a gentle undulation, nobly wooded, and slowly reach East Bergholt Church, where some of the painter's kinsfolk lie buried. Here you turn suddenly, your carriage dips under over-arching oak and elm, having the lovely vale of Dedham to your right. No wonder that Constable so dearly loved this spot. The tower of Dedham Church rises grandly amid terrace upon terrace of Lombardy poplar and willow; amid the bright green meadows winds a little river, whilst patches of red, yellow, and crimson, proclaim the flower-fields of Dedham, a brilliant incongruity, doubtless unknown in Constable's time.

But the spot they loved best was Flatford Mill, beautiful Flatford Mill! Nestled amid cherry and pear trees lies the Valley Farm, while close by is Willy Lott's house, white-walled, red-tiled, covered with vines. Mill and boat-house are reflected in the clear river that, with sudden swerve, loses itself under shadow of alder and weeping willow. A daintier scene it would be hard to find; and well might the great painter love it, and hunger after it in his later days.

Or if the historic fit seized them, they would follow the flight of refractory Sir Hugh Bigod, of whom the ballad tells:—

"At Ipswich they laughed to see how he sped,
And at Ufford they stared, I wis,
But at merry Saxmundham they heard his song,
And the song he sang was this:—
Were I in my castle Hungaye,
Upon the river of Waveney,
I would not care for the King of Cockney."

August came—the month of orchards flushed with ripening pear and plum, of harvest-fields strewn with gold and amber corn. Like Cyclops the labourers sweated and toiled, drinking beer at intervals in a manner worthy of a Scandinavian drinking bout. Nothing could be lovelier than the yellow fields sloping against the pure blue and white heavens; and the gleaners—little white-haired, blue-eyed children, and sunburnt, serious women—made an idyllic picture every day. When, a little later, the stars came out in the pale sky, and the harvest-moon rose, glowing like a shield of the gods, reapers and gleaners followed their homeward waggons, singing plaintively and carrying green boughs.

Those were indeed days to remember and be thankful for. Monsieur Sylvestre and

his companions, like Odusseus, were made young and happy, but by earthly and not by heavenly enchantment. It was Ingaretha whose thoughtfulness and delicacy and affection worked every one of these miracles. Never were kings and princes fêted by sycophant subjects as the wanderers were fêted by her. Her horses, her carriages, the fatness of her larder, and the first-fruits of her gardens, were appropriated to them as naturally as if she were only the steward of so many good things. The upper ten thousand of St. Beowulf's might be neglected. What were the upper ten thousand to her? But none in all the world could be dearer than these outcasts who loved the things she loved, and lived in the ideal world she held true and beautiful. Carew at first chafed bitterly at the sense of his own comparative insignificance, but good sense and good feeling soon got the mastery. Having, moreover, a little of the butterfly in his composition, he sunned himself whilst the flowers were open and the day was perfect. All projects of travel were put aside. One day he was reading poetry aloud to all, another singing glees with Monsieur Sylvestre and Ingaretha. There seemed always plenty to do. Why should he go away? Of course the fashionable world took umbrage at seeing themselves thus set aside for a few tatterdemalion foreigners. They had not the least intention of recognising these visitors of Miss Meadowcourt's; and as week after week slipped by, and no more invitations came from the Abbey, hostess and guests were left pretty much to themselves. When Lady Virginia Pennington gave her annual croquet party, Ingaretha and Carew naturally received cards. Mr. Stapleton would not hear of omitting Ingaretha from the list of people invited to the Miss Stapletons' archery meeting. The great church dignitary of the place, Mr. Anstruther, rector of St. Beowulf's the Martyr and rural dean, paid due court to the rich young mistress of the Abbey, pressing her attendance at this and that choral fête, sending Mrs. Anstruther, and a number of little Anstruthers, to see her very often. And all the great little people of the place behaved civilly both to Ingaretha and Carew, not because they liked them, or felt they ever should like them, but because it seemed a right and proper thing to cultivate the acquaintance of three or four thousand a-year.

By one or two, however, the strangers were received with open arms. Amy Greenfield, the curate's wife, got up half-a-dozen tea-parties for them, delighted at the opportunity of showing her adored Ingaretha

a little kindness. One wonders at the possibility of giving tea-parties in the curate's household, where the ordinary condition of things was that of verging on starvation. But what has real hospitality to do with cakes and ale? The Bedouin's dish of *cous-cous-sou* and the Berber's offering of a few dried figs to the passer-by, may often mean more than groaning tables and wines of choicest vintage. Amy gave the best that she had, and it was accepted with a good grace. The children would pull radishes out of their little garden; Bina would fetch a pennyworth of gingerbread nuts from the village; Mrs. Minifie often brought cakes; was not this enough and to spare? And if there was no butter forthcoming for the next day's breakfast, and Daisy the cow gave less milk than usual after the last night's draining, who grumbled?

Happy indeed were those summer evenings. Even the curate got over his moody fits and joined the party, feeling no shame since the other men wore clothes as shabby as he. What a change it was for Amy, for her children, and for all! Instead of being looked down upon by rich rectors and rectoresses, they were made much of, fêted, loved, for their own sakes. Bina and Sammie were old enough to feel the difference between the gingerly kiss of an Earl's daughter, or the pat on the head of a rural dean, and those of a fellow-vagrant like René or Maddio. For René would make desperate love to little blue-eyed Bina, ever, like Martha, troubled about many things; and Maddio would treat Sammie, not patronisingly, having in mind his unwashed face, want of new shoes, and general unfitness for appearance at church next Sunday, but as a comrade and social equal. When Maddio amused the baby for an hour, or René quitted the society of his equals to give Pennie a swing, or improvise a puppet-show in the nursery for the benefit of all the children, they preached a lesson on being good one to another, which was easier to understand than the most eloquent of Mr. Anstruther's discourses. The children thought there never were such enchanting people in the world as these friends of Ingaretha's, and wondered what would happen by way of miracle next.

"We are always having company or going out now," one day said Bina to Mrs. Anstruther, who had called at the curate's. "I like that sort of life, don't you?"

Amy blushed, for she knew that to see the poverty of the land was Mrs. Anstruther come.

"You children think so much of a little," she said, adding apologetically, "Bina means that Miss Meadowcourt brings her friends here to tea sometimes. Of course I cannot be so stingy as to refuse them that little hospitality."

"Stinginess, my dear Mrs. Greenfield, is purely relative. No economy is stinginess in the wife of a poor man and the mother of a large young family. Why don't you turn the tables, and go to Miss Meadowcourt's instead?"

"So we do very, very often," poor Amy said, feeling more and more humiliated at the turn the conversation was taking.

"And we get such feasts!" put in Bina; "the children eat as much cake as they like, and what they don't eat, is packed up for us to bring home. I love Ingaretha."

"Miss Meadowcourt shows strange perversity of character for so young a woman," Mrs. Anstruther went on, turning to Amy, "and, I must say, indiscretion too. What do we know of those queer foreign friends of hers?"

"Mr. René wanted bread often when he was little," Bina said.

"Bina!"

"He did, mamma. He told me so."

The little girl felt a wicked delight in horrifying Mrs. Anstruther just then, and being as enamoured of René as ever was seven-year-old maiden of fairy-tale lover, here added, by way of climax,—

"And I am sure he is as good as can be, though he doesn't go to church."

"Bina!" again remonstrated Amy, quite frightened at the way Mrs. Anstruther's eyebrows were going up. "Don't talk about things you don't understand." Then, changing the subject, she said, "Thank you so much for kindly sending me the new number of 'Sermons for the Nursery,' Mrs. Anstruther, and 'Solemn Exhortations to Infant Minds.'"

"My children delight in them, and only think, little Edmund, who is barely three years old, cried because the nursemaid would read a newspaper on Sunday. When children's minds are thus early turned to religion, one feels that one's house is indeed a fortress of the faith."

"Yes, indeed. I wish my children took kindlier to Sunday books," Amy said, having got into a habit of involuntarily sitting at Mrs. Anstruther's feet. She did not in her heart care much about the Sunday books.

"Evil communications corrupt good manners," Mrs. Anstruther answered. "Your

children should not be allowed to associate with non-churchgoers."

Amy felt ready to cry. She was a very simple creature, unable to appraise the different ethical standards held up to her, equally unable to solve the various social and religious problems often propounded in her hearing. On the one hand, were Ingaretha and her friends, representatives of all that was refined, original, delightful; on the other, the rector of St. Beowulf, the church, and the world, representative of all that was old as the hills, traditional, powerful, ascetic, imperious. She felt a child, a nonentity, a miserable sinner in the presence of the tiniest little Anstruther that could read a sermon. She felt a rational being, a creature of instincts, poetry, and passion, in the presence of Monsieur Sylvestre and his followers. There was just this difference between the one set of people and the other, the first looked down upon her as an atom of the great lump of human depravity, the last prized her as a link in the great chain of intellectual being; and to the last she could not naturally be an object either of indifference or contempt. This poor, trodden-down, ill-used humanity was to them, above all things, lovely, sacred, and dear; and she, being a woman, and like all women, having had a touch of sweetness and a large measure of sadness in her life, was lovely, sacred, and dear also. How could she contentedly come down from such heights as these to the dead level of content and indifference in which they would fain have her live, possessing her soul in patience? Poor Amy! she said her prayers twice or three times after that unpleasant little talk with the dean's wife, dreading she knew not what kind of interference with the pleasurable existence she had of late so learned to love. Whether there was harm in it or no, she felt unable to determine; but thus much she knew, the life of the last few years seemed a waste, and that of the last few weeks an oasis, green, smiling, favoured of heaven. She might forego the happiness, but the memory of it and the longing for it would last throughout life.

CHAPTER XII.—STORMS.

THE only person who led a double existence—smiling cheerfully in the company of others, brooding or rather remembering over much when alone—was Madame Sylvestre. She could never forget, and what a fearful chastisement of the gods is such a memory! Ingaretha might soothe and distract; Monsieur Sylvestre might say a tender word, and then go his

ways bent on the business of the hour; Maddio, brother-like, might babble his simple confidences and revelations; René might offer his passionate confidences fondly as a son—the combined affection of all could not drive away the mysterious shadow which followed her everywhere. Sometimes her face was a tragedy. At others, she wore that look of supreme resignation which mediæval artists have given their martyrs of the primitive Christian period. At all, there was a pathos, an inexpressible majesty of suffering about her that made her presence imposing even to the vulgar.

Nor did the subtle charms of her physiognomy escape the notice of those dull-headed St. Beowulfians with whom she came in contact. Weather-beaten, careworn, elderly, dressed with no more regard to fashion than a beggar-woman, the rough villagers yet touched their hats to her as respectfully as to dashing Mrs. Anstruther. And why? Because there is a divine instinct in human nature, however degraded, and by this divine instinct Madame Sylvestre was recognised for what she was, and not for what misfortune had made her. Those large brown eyes of hers, brimming over with tenderness and sympathy; those delicately cut, sensitive lips, smiling seldom and sadly; that broad, earnest brow, each wrinkle telling of some troubled day, those sunburnt, hard-worked hands, so beautifully shaped still—all impressed the people as even fine clothes and superficial advantages would not have done. Silk dresses and shining carriages might be seen every day within a dozen miles of St. Beowulf's, but a face like hers, so storytelling, so good, so refined, was as rare as primroses in November. She had a habit, too, of speaking to every one she met, ploughmen, cow-boy, gleaner, and after the first difficulty of understanding her foreign English wore off, these short greetings grew into long confidences. She addressed everybody as Monsieur and Madame, behaving with a courtesy that struck her interlocutors as whimsical at first, but pleased them mightily afterwards. These rough villagers recognised not only the beautiful character of the long-suffering, many-experienced, patient woman, but the tact, and breeding, and sensitiveness of the well-bred lady. When they saw Miss Meadowcourt's friend and honoured guest, trudging to St. Beowulf's in the heat of the day, thankful to teach small shopkeepers' children for a shilling an hour, their stock notions of propriety were shocked, but their intellectual horizon was enlarged. The world

could not be going on quite as they thought. Not from Christ's words only, but from the practical teaching of the first lady in the parish, they were reminded of that desirable millennium when the mighty shall be put down and the lowly and meek shall be exalted. There could be no doubt that Miss Meadowcourt thought very highly of Madame Sylvestre. Did she not sit beside her, shabby as she was, in the Abbey pew, opposite to the Miss Stapletons, arrayed like Solomon, in all their glory? Did she not drive her in her grand open carriage to St. Beowulf's floral fête? Was she not daily and hourly doing honour to her? A sermon was being preached to them on social obligation, which touched their self-love and tickled their curiosity. What time-honoured custom would be turned upside down next? There was, moreover, the sense of mystery about her—always an attraction to uncultivated minds. They could as little understand Madame Sylvestre's objective as they could understand her subjective history. She was religious, and apparently belonged to no religious body; she was a lady, and had suffered more hardships than any tramp's wife going; she was delicate and refined, and had been mixed up with what to them seemed the scum of the earth. Added to all, this wonderful faith, and love, and humanitarian spirit confounded them more than a little. Sunday after Sunday, they had heard of God's love for man, till the exposition of the familiar text had become trite and barren. But for the first time they heard of man's love for man! The words worked miracles like those wrought by musical Orpheus upon the listening woods of Thrace.

After some weeks, Mr. Whitelock began to prick up his ears. Wherever he went among his parishioners, he found that Madame Sylvestre had been before him, first to the mother of some erring girl, next to the parents of some dying child, and so on. Her words were twice as potent as his, and no wonder, seeing that he talked of things they could not possibly understand, consoling them with the unction and cold superiority of God's anointed, whilst she wept, aided, and sympathised, and that was all. Matters were brought to a climax by the death of an unbaptized child. Mr. Whitelock doomed it to everlasting perdition. Madame Sylvestre appointed it to blissful immortality. The mother, whose ewe-lamb it had been, was heard to say in somebody's hearing that she wished the rector would never cross her threshold again; and this

speech, spoken in the agonies of her grief, came to his ears. If such were the teachings of Miss Meadowcourt's visitors, it was high time to interfere. Let people once believe that an unbaptized infant could go to heaven, and the next step would be to doubt the efficacy of baptism altogether. And if baptism went, why should not confirmation and other corner-stones of the Church follow in its wake?

He lost no time in laying his case before Ingaretha. Hot, wordy, and very cross, anybody else would have been a better advocate for the rector than the rector proved for himself. He found that after half an hour's harangue, no ground had been gained, not an inch. There sat Ingaretha without a vestige of conviction in those large blue eyes of hers, and smiling in the old incredulous way he knew so well; looking so provokingly pretty too in her sea-green cambric dress, that it was in his heart to wish beauty a dispensation of priests, as of the Olympian gods, to be given and taken away at will. Ugliness, after all, had its captivating side. Ugliness submitted, ugliness embroidered clerical slippers, made black-currant jelly for the alleviation of clerical sore throats,—in fine, did everything it behoved womankind to do in honour of the wiser, better, and stronger sex.

"I am not my friends' keeper," Ingaretha said, after listening somewhat impatiently to a long and angry tirade. "And if Madame Sylvestre tries to comfort the poor people a little, are their lives so happy that they do not need it?"

"To allay sorrow with false doctrine is to try to cure disease with poison," answered the rector. "I cannot and will not permit lay interference with spiritual matters in my parish. Who is the priest—this woman or I?"

"My poor friend only did a kind and neighbourly thing. Was your authority called into account?"

"Not when she contradicts my doctrine? Excuse me, Miss Meadowcourt, but I think your partiality for these people is leading your judgment astray, and, what is more still, endangering your orthodoxy. With the perversity of your youth, and, I may say, of your sex, you refuse to take counsel of your natural advisers, and are running into dangers of which you know not."

Ingaretha was silent.

"I must ask you to remonstrate with Madame Sylvestre," added the rector.

But Ingaretha did not answer.

"She is bound to desist from pernicious

offices in my parish," he went on, looking at her severely.

Still no answer.

"You are bound, in the spirit, if not in the letter, to send her out of my parish."

"If Madame Sylvestre yields an inch, an ell will be demanded of me," Ingaretha answered at last, with heightened colour. "If Madame Sylvestre is not allowed to speak to the poor people to-day, I shall be prohibited to-morrow. We are not bond-servants, Mr. Whitelock."

"Do you mean to say that you set yourself in opposition to your minister?"

"Not willingly."

"But you abide by your own judgment, rather than by his."

"When I think my friends in the right, I stand by them," she said.

"Then I can only pray for you. Good morning;" and with this the rector went.

Ingaretha smiled at first, but felt in her secret heart that a quarrel with Mr. Whitelock was an unpleasant alternative. She had no wish to quarrel with him, and had, with difficulty, avoided all quarrels hitherto; just now, when so much depended on his good graces, a disagreement was especially unfortunate. English country life is far from a bed of roses when you are on bad terms with your rector: and this she knew well enough. But she could not ask Madame Sylvestre to unsay her merciful words about the unbaptized child. If Mr. Whitelock could make no better terms than these, they must remain at enmity. As to her friends being sent away, the idea was so preposterous that she laughed scornfully whenever it came into her head. What was property, what was existence, what was anything to her, without the privilege of serving those she loved?

Although she kept her own counsel studiously, reports of this interview got wind. Madame Sylvestre, after weeping in secret at the mischief she had done, talked to her husband seriously about going away from this blissful, beneficent England—from this gracious and grace-giving friend—from peace and plenty—to return no more.

"We shall bring her into trouble," she said. "I foresee it but too well. Her thoughts are not as the thoughts of the people here, and it is with them she must live."

"She had much better live with us," answered Monsieur Sylvestre complacently. "If we estrange her from her friends, let us console ourselves by the thought of what those friends are worth. If we cause her vexation, do we not also afford her the

greatest enjoyment of which an intellectual being is capable, namely, that of sympathy with large interests! Oh, when will you learn to subordinate the trivial affairs of life to the Supreme and Unlimited!"

"Dear husband, it is my great affection for Ingaretha that speaks. She is young, and we are old. At our age it is so much easier to take away than to give."

"Pshaw! my child. The value of a gift is measured by the quality of the giver. Our Ingaretha will not be discontent."

"But," urged the poor woman, struggling, as she had struggled a hundred, nay, a thousand times before, with her adoration of this man and her sense of duty towards others, "it is her very generosity and goodness that abash me. Is it not enough to eat of her bread and drink of her wine, without spoiling the taste of both to her?"

"Heavens, Euphrosyne, how you women turn things upside down! As if a half-blind person could not see how entirely this dear child loves us, and delights in making us happy!"

"I know all that," answered Euphrosyne, with a painful sigh; "but we must look beyond the passing hour. What if she grows fond of our poor René?"

"The best thing in the world that could happen to him!"

"But surely a misfortune for her?"

"A misfortune—and why? You seem to think that the real philosophy of life consists in measuring out purple and fine linen for Dives. I prefer to wash the disciples' feet—or, rather, to have my own feet washed by some one adorable. And this, I take it, is the corner-stone of social morality. René has nothing; Ingaretha has enough, and to spare. Both are young, beautiful, and enthusiastic. Such a union might not be sanctioned on earth; but what would the angels and hierarchs of heaven say to it, think you?"

"It would not turn out well," Euphrosyne said, shaking her head.

"Did you not sacrifice as much and more for me? And has not that union turned out well?"

"Yes—oh, yes!" she answered, half-crying at the sound of her own memory-freighted voice; "But I think, if Ingaretha cared as much for René as in my youth I cared for you, the matter would have been settled long ere this. Oh, husband, you do not know how it is with us women—how, most of all, we suffer for having once been happy! Even if our sweet child loved this man, I would say, nay; because I should

doubt whether she loved him enough to endure what must come after."

"Nothing could come so hard to bear as unsatisfied love. Of that you have had no experience," he said, in a tone of voice that was half-commendatory and half-reproachful.

"You forget my children," she answered, averting her face because she knew of the misery that was in it.

He left her, humming as he went a verse of Beranger's well-known song, "*Les Fous*,"—

"Honneur au fou qui ferait faire
Un rêve heureux au genre humain," &c.

CHAPTER XIII.—A SYLVAN CONCLAVE.

INGARETHA saw clearly enough that, if Mr. Whitelock chose to be ill-tempered, she should lead an uneasy life of it. She was not the woman to humble herself before her enemies without rhyme or reason, much less to turn her back upon her friends, even when the world told her that there were the best possible reasons for doing so. She understood quite well what Mr. Whitelock meant by praying for her. He would pray, not that she should be made better or happier or more useful in her generation, but that she should become more docile to the dictation of her superiors; in other words, that she should obey him in all things. She felt inclined to defy his undue assumption of authority; to do battle with him, and find out, for once and for all, who was strongest. But good feeling and a sense of maidenly decorum prevailed.

Ingaretha pursued quite another course. She straightway wrote a meek little note to the rector begging him to overlook her impetuosity, and to call upon her about a little matter of business. She wanted his advice as well as his forgiveness, and of course the happy rector was willing to bestow both. Ingaretha wished to consult him about establishing mothers-meetings. Was there any objection to Madame Sylvestre taking part in them if she withheld from theological subjects? Certainly not, said the rector, good-naturedly; and when, next day, Madame Sylvestre made an apology in person at the rectory, beseeching the reverend gentleman, with tears in her eyes, to pardon her unintentional offence, he was fairly overcome and mollified. The clerical storm passed over.

Meantime, like children sporting in some sunny place, with bright clouds overhead, and a low rumble of gathering thunder in the distance, Monsieur Sylvestre, René, and Maddio were taking their fill of enjoyment, thinking little of the morrow. When, at last,

Euphrosyne one day compelled them to assemble in conclave under Ingaretha's chestnut trees and discuss future plans, they scuttled to the place of meeting much more after the manner of rabbits at play, than of philosophic followers of a reformer.

The speeches, which were delivered in French, might be translated thus:—

Madame Sylvestre began by saying that one obstacle stood equally in the way of going or staying—namely, their exchequer was almost empty. They could not make a move without money. Without money they could not remain where they were.

"If Ingaretha does not object to help us, why should we object to be helped?" asked Monsieur Sylvestre. "Granted that she spares us a few of her fat acres and a handful of her loose guineas, which of the two ought to be most thankful, him to whom the gods give superabundant opportunities of helping others, or him whom that superabundance helps? The more we accept of her, the more enviable is she."

Euphrosyne was silent, but unconvinced. She looked first at Maddio, then at René, half hoping they would stand by her. Maddio met the look, and answered with the unconscious smile of a baby—

"And then René is so fond of her! could we rob her of him?"

"Don't talk in that way," René said, vehement and disdainful. "I know well enough where I ought to be, hundreds of miles, thousands of miles away from this lady. My mother, you know how I fight daily and hourly with a devil that is stronger than I, and how I am beaten again and again. I wish I could kill myself outright, and have done with it, much as I love our cause and you all."

"That would not go far towards mending matters," Monsieur Sylvestre answered, smiling grimly. "She would break her heart; you would find no one here willing to bury such an infidel as yourself. Live as long as you can, my dear René, for the sake of your friends and the good cause of fraternity and freedom."

"And worship our lady Ingaretha as we do, at a distance," said Maddio.

"Listen, my children," began Monsieur Sylvestre, placing himself in the midst, every tone of his sweet rich voice ringing through the air like the note of a silver-tongued bell. "It is now high time that we come to an understanding as to our future course of action. Do not think for a moment that I have allowed myself luxuriously to settle down in this bewitching Capua, without paying any

heed to our common cause. Night and day it is in my thoughts. Sleeping or waking, I dream of the noble work that awaits the reconstructors of society. If I have kept silence for awhile, it was only because I feared to speak too confidently. From the first moment of setting foot on this hospitable soil, it seemed to me that here, if anywhere on the face of the earth, we might realise our fondest hopes, planting another Eden, not for ourselves only, but for the outcast, the unhappy, and the spoliated. And now I feel emboldened to say that it shall be so. Ingaretha has received us with open arms. Her purse, like her heart, is open to us. Her intellect—surely, a nobler one has been seldom granted to woman—goes with us. We are her brothers and sisters, her friends and counsellors, her prophets and priests. We will stay.”

René made an impetuous movement as if about to speak, then coloured to the brow, and drew back. Maddio smiled in his usual benignant, half-dazed way, looked round at the others, smiled again, then made answer:—

“Of course we stay if you say so, my father. But if we stay, we must set to work. Give me children to teach, or a house to build, or a printing press—or I will turn tailor if you like, and repair our failing garments.”

“Wait a little,” Monsieur Sylvestre went on. “You will soon find enough to do, brother Maddio, never fear. I have not come to so important a resolve without thinking of preliminaries. To stay in England is to carry out our ideal, and to carry out our ideal is again to turn tillers of the soil. Agriculture, says Proudhon, is of all occupations the noblest, the most healthful, both morally and physically, and with regard to the exercise of intellectual faculties, the most encyclopædic. Now, you all know as well as I do, that we do not look upon Proudhon’s words as golden always, nor even silver, but these are oracular. The experience of my life goes to prove them so. We remain, therefore, what we have always been, agriculturists.”

“But this is not a new country, remember that,” put in Madame Sylvestre timidly. “Land here is more precious than pearls and diamonds. Ought we to borrow more than we can ever repay?”

“How women lose themselves when once launched on the ocean of the practical! My dear wife, sympathetic affection is a merciful creditor. Our Ingaretha knows well enough that we have had misfortunes, and may have them again. What of that? Fortune may forsake us; vitality may desert us un-

aware, and little enough can we leave behind to admonish or ameliorate the world; we have done our best, and may have furthered the glorious ideas of our great teachers. The rest we must leave.”

“Oh!” Madame Sylvestre continued, with a gathering passion of entreaty in her voice, “let us consider well ere we do that which will surely bring trouble upon her. Lead us elsewhere, dear husband, and leave Ingaretha unharmed.”

“She is right,” cried René with a sudden glow upon his cheek and fire in his eye. “Because Ingaretha is dear to us, and we are dear to her, all the more we should go in a month, in a week, in a day if you like, only let us go.”

Madame Sylvestre caught the young man’s hand and pressed it to her own, whispering words of approval. Monsieur Sylvestre smiled and went on—

“Were ever disciples so docile and, at the same time, so captious as you two? But I look upon you as children in experience, and forgive. You bid me lead you elsewhere, and, as a reason for making this request, you hold up Ingaretha’s love before us. Good heavens! would not Ingaretha’s indifference be a much better reason for going? She can as little afford to lose us as we can afford to lose her. To suffer for the truth is divine, but to suffer for the friends we adore is a much more enviable privilege, since it brings humanity near to the gods and leaves it humanity still. Granted that if we went away, Ingaretha would be spared some tears—and, since gold and dross must be mixed in life, some money too; that she would, in fact, lie softly on her bed of roses, undisturbed by the sufferings of the world. Is that a fitting lie for a high souled woman? Fêted, flattered, absorbed into a frivolous and parasitic society, the godlike spark within her would go out, and on her dying bed she would reproach us for so inhuman a piece of kindness. Leave her if you will, but not in such hands as these. She is too good to become the woman of fashion or of the world.”

“There is no fear of that,” René said impatiently.

“What do you know about it, dear little brother? You have never lived in the world, luckily for you. You have no idea how easy it is to wear the harness of conventionalism after a few trials, and if we leave Ingaretha to her fate she is quite likely to get presented at Court and marry the most determined enemy of progress going.”

"And if she were happy, why not?" pursued René, turning red and pale by turns. "Let the truth suffer, but let her be happy."

"Never!" cried Monsieur Sylvestre with fire. "We are not monkeys, who think it a good day's work to steal and crack one extra nut for their own gratification. Ingaretha is made of good stuff like ourselves. She shall share our triumphs or defeats. She loves the truth—a rare quality in a woman—and come what come may, she shall be one of us."

"But," began René, much agitated, "you don't understand. *Mon père*, I love this sweet

thing. She cares for me—perhaps—a little—yet we cannot marry each other, you know why. Oh! *ma mère*, Euphrosyne, speak in my place. I cannot say what is in my heart!"

He turned his back on the little group, and seating himself in the shade plucked at the grass, half crying. Euphrosyne put her hand on her husband's arm, and began to plead in his behalf; but Monsieur Sylvestre was in no mood to listen. Smiling, in his lofty, intractable way, he brought his discourse to a climax thus:—

"After all, what is the happiness of the



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individual? I see no reason why Ingaretha should not be happy, and, for the matter of that, René either. But we must forget ourselves, remembering only the ties of a common cause and a common brotherhood. Our undertaking is not entered upon from desire of gain or motives of self-interest, but for the sake of that cause and in the spirit of that brotherhood. Long live the noble fraternity of Fourierists! Embrace me, my wife; embrace me, my brothers. Happy am I who lead, thrice happy are ye who follow, in the quest of a perfect state and a Golden Age!"

Thereupon the meeting broke up. Anything like business had certainly not been transacted, but the all-important question of going or staying was settled beyond dispute.

CHAPTER XIV.—LOVER AND HERO.

EUPHROSYNÉ and René found themselves alone under the trees. René held out his hand to her, with a look of childlike entreaty for sympathy and help. She put it to her lips and cheek, as caressingly as if he had been her son, and for a little time neither spoke. At length he said—



"SEATING HIMSELF IN THE SHADE PLUCKED AT THE GRASS, HALF CRYING."

"Oh, my mother, it has come to this, then! I must go alone."

"Do you love her so?" she asked tenderly.

"It is not that. I would rather stay—even if I saw her married to the rich Monsieur Carew; at least, I think so. But I cannot find it in my heart to stand by and see her sacrificed. You know what I mean. If we stay she will suffer, as sure as our creed is a true one."

"Ah!" cried Madame Sylvestre, with a look of pain impossible to describe. "This is the saddest thing in life. We, who love the truth, make martyrs of our friends."

"Mind, I do not reproach *him*. Heaven forbid! But I feel, I see, how all this will end. Suffering makes seers of us all. The most dazzling visions do not mislead me for a moment. I descry what lies on the further side of our father's golden dreams—persecution, disappointment, defeat, perhaps death. One by one, these woes will overtake us, not because our ideas are false, but because the world is not yet ready for them."

"It is all true; yet he will never believe it."

"Never, never! If he lived a hundred years, and planned a hundred Utopias, he would never believe it. Don't think I reproach him for this blindness, self-devotion—call it what you like. I envy him: I would be blind too if I could—except for Ingaretha's sake."

He turned to her eagerly, and added in a different key:—

"I am no renegade. If there was a revolution in Paris to-morrow, I would be the first to mount the breach in the cause of the people and liberty, and risk my neck the hundredth time as readily as I did the ninety-ninth; but never by act of mine shall hair of her dear head be harmed. I did not know how it was till I came to England and saw her in her home—almost a princess! She is the same as ever, but things seem changed to me for all that. What *notre père* says may be all true: her life might become unworthy of so noble a nature if we leave her to herself—flatterers might spoil her, parasites might prey upon her; she might in time grow into a wholly different being. But we do not know it, and we have no right to surmise it. I am not sure that the lot we have to give her is better than that to which she was born. Such a woman must do good anywhere. Oh, my friend, my more than mother, for her sake would we had starved in the desert!"

"Would that we had!" she said fervently.

"You see," he went on in the same eager tone, "to that one friend—our only one in the world—we have a thousand enemies, and we can never tell when any one of them may turn upon us."

"Ah, you may well say so! And what enemies have I, of my own flesh and blood!—those who were once babes at my breast, fondling me with little helpless hands! René, you don't dream of these when you speak of our enemies."

"No, no. When I speak of enemies, I mean ideas rather than persons. In this free England, men cannot be imprisoned for their opinions, but they can be scoffed at, persecuted, hunted down; and how will Ingaretha suffer when evil days overtake her friends! Offence must come, as the Scripture says, but woe be to him by whom it cometh; and we are of those by whom it cometh. Think you this deceitful peace brooding over the luxurious English nation is to last for ever? The freedom of the workman, like the freedom of the slave, must be brought about here as elsewhere by the reform that begins in revolution; and upon us Socialists will all the blame fall. The pastor, Mr. Whitelock, is already on the alert, making mischief out of our most harmless words and deeds. Ingaretha cannot shield us. And then—and then there is her rich neighbour the poet, Monsieur Carew, who is in love with her! I had better get clean out of her sight."

"My poor René!"

"Don't pity me, but help me to do the right and manly thing I ought. It is all very well for you, for *notre père*, and for Maddio, to stay. With me it is different. She is so generous that she would feel any happiness she allowed herself a reproach to me, and it breaks her heart to see me unfortunate. I have a genius for writing of a certain kind, but what good is it, seeing I was born a beggar and Ingaretha a princess! Some men would do wonderful things if they could handle a pen as well as I. I never shall, and I cannot sit like a dog at Ingaretha's feet, taking bread from her hands. Could any man? I will go back to my own people, and help them as best I can, marry a workwoman, perhaps, and rear children to hate the class to which Ingaretha belongs. What else is left for me?"

Both were silent. What comfort had she to give? What solace had he to take? These things not seldom happen in life. Two friends are bound to each other by innumerable sympathies, sorrows, tenderesses, and yet, when a dread calamity comes upon one of

them, the other has no word of consolation to offer! The familiar name is uttered, the friendly hand is held out, the fond eyes are full of tears. And that is all. Is it well or ill? We know not, and can only guess. Thus much we know. If friendship were omnipotent and love without flaw, none would be willing to turn their faces towards the unfamiliar hereafter, which may be sleep, change, perfected existence, we know not what. Madame Sylvestre and René sat holding each other's hands, and thinking these thoughts in silence till the sun was blazing in crimson splendour behind the chestnut trees, and the bosquets and glades around them had grown dusky and solemn. The setting of the sun is ever a wonder to reverent minds. The two watched the transformations of the fiery orb in as rapt a mood as fire-worshippers or early believers in the Sun-god of the glowing chariot. When the glorious coruscations of purple and orange and violet had melted into a sea of pearl and opal, and one silvery star twinkled in the west, they felt as if they too had battled enough with passion for one day, and both sank into a calm, religious mood.

"After all," René said, "Nature has given what Life has withheld. If I lose Ingaretha, I have lived never-to-be-forgotten days, and still see beautiful things wherever I go."

He was to see something even more beautiful than the lovely sky and the trembling stars and the dusky pomp of the chestnut alley; for no sooner had they emerged into the luminous twilight of the open lawn than Ingaretha advanced towards them, golden-haired, white-robed, radiant.

She gave a hand to each, and chided them for being so late.

"I hold court to-night. Did you forget it?" she asked. "Mr. Carew is here, one or two others are coming, and we are going to sing old English ditties. Run to the village, good Monsieur René, and come back transformed into a dandy. But stay; the dinner is just ready, and I will not impose such hard conditions upon you. Monsieur Sylvestre must take you in hand."

Monsieur Sylvestre met them in the porch, wearing a dress-coat of the latest fashion, the origin of which only Euphrosyne could have explained, irreproachable boots, pantaloons, and waistcoat, pale lavender gloves, and a white necktie. His long soft hair, bright as silver, reached to his shoulders, his eyes sparkled, his cheeks glowed. To Euphrosyne his appearance had never seemed more imposing.

"What have you two been doing?" he said. "I had settled everything. Why, René, at your age I should have spent an hour curling those black locks of yours before entering the society of ladies."

René hung back to whisper to Euphrosyne—"You will try to make her believe afterwards that I have done what is right? And you promise not to betray me before the time?"

"Yes, indeed, yes," whispered the other, and then the two went their ways to prepare for dinner. Monsieur Sylvestre took René up-stairs, persuaded him to curl and perfume his locks, and don some black clothes he brought out for him—your true Bohemians have a marvellous knack of adapting themselves to each other's clothes—finally paraded him up and down the room, to see whether the result was satisfactory. Then they descended, to find Carew, Amy Greenfield and her husband, Mr. Whitelock, and one or two others, assembled in the drawing-room. Ingaretha, taking Monsieur Sylvestre's arm, marshalled her guests to the dinner-table. A choicer little banquet was never set before love, genius, and Socialism. There were flowers of great beauty in silver épergnes, wines of various perfume and flavour in chased decanters, a pyramid of peaches, grapes and nectarines in the midst, and dainty dishes in profusion, but not superabundance, followed one after the other.

Ingaretha's cheeks glowed with pleasure. These guests and good friends of hers were not wearers of purple and fine linen, who fared sumptuously every day. With the exception of Carew and the rector, she felt sure that none had dined so sumptuously for months, perhaps years past. How genially they accepted her hospitality! how each vied with the other in furnishing the piquant story, the neat epigram, the apt quotation! When Monsieur Sylvestre began to speak, every one else was silent. He talked mostly of himself and his ideas, but with so much liveliness and enthusiasm, and such a charming manner, that his listeners could have sat for hours. It is true, much that he said was wholly incomprehensible to most of them. What of that? Do we understand the canticles of the birds in which we delight? or the delicious humming of happy insects on a summer morning? or the solemn symphonies of the woods when the orchestra of the winds is doing its mightiest? We listen in simple wonder just as these good folks listened to the silvery-tongued old man discoursing of Plato's ideal state, of Utopias, mediæval and modern, of Fourier and his Phalanstery.

But when the dinner ended, the best part of the entertainment began. A discreet host knows that the secret of society consists in a nicely adjusted system of exactions. People do not care to go to a house where nothing is expected of them. Turn your drawing-room into a stage on which everybody has his part to play, and all find amusement. Poor Ingaretha had a large lump of mediocrity to deal with, and but a little leaven of the fiery material, call it genius, enthusiasm, what you will. She summoned all-potent music to her aid. The glees, madrigals, and choruses in which each took such genial part had been mastered in a series of rehearsals, so that everything went smoothly, and everybody could praise everybody without being accused of partiality. Even Mr. Whitelock was pressed into the service, and thought his voice had never sounded better than in Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song,' or 'By Celia's arbour.' Amy, who sang like a thrush, was in her element. She forgot all about the well-darned white muslin dress that she had ironed that morning with so many feminine pangs, and the children who had tumbled into the pond, and the bread that had been burnt to a cinder in the oven, and the hundred daily troubles at home. Life was perfect for one long evening.

Poor René had one foot in heaven and one in hell. There was Ingaretha doing her best to please both her admirers and offend neither. Ingaretha—whom his whole being worshipped madly; Ingaretha, the sweetest of all sweet women, smiling upon him, and he had no choice but to leave her!

Like the poor fools that all lovers are, he did an ill-advised thing. He had said to himself before joining his dear hostess and her guests that now if ever was the time to be forbearing and good and self-devoted, and his forbearance and goodness and self-devotion went no farther than this:—

Carew sat at the piano, bringing out stray melodies with careless hand, as your true musician can, Ingaretha standing by his side, gay and eager. He had been singing a love-song to her of his own composition, music and words—and what woman can withstand such flattery as that?

"I wish you would write a play for us to act at Christmas," she said; "or if you like it better, a masque after the olden style, or an operetta. How delightful it would be!"

"I will do anything to please you, of course," he answered.

"Do that then. May I choose the subject?"

"Yes—no—that is, I cannot write a piece to order, but I will receive suggestions."

Ingaretha, full of the play, turned to René and said—

"I have a splendid idea. Monsieur René guesses without a word, I know."

"I can't guess anything to-night. I am stupid," poor René answered; adding, "and sad besides."

She did not heed the latter part of the speech, saying playfully—

"But you have no right to be stupid to-night. It is unreasonable."

She went on talking about the play to Mr. Carew.

René grew more and more miserable. He was about to sacrifice himself for this woman as none other of her lovers or friends would sacrifice themselves, and was chidden for a sorrowful look and word. It was true, she did not know of his intention, but she knew his love for her, the length and breadth and depth of it only too well. How could she treat him thus? He took an opportunity of stealing away, and left the house without having said good-night.

CHAPTER XV.—GOING INTO EXILE.

RENÉ rose whilst the mists of early autumn lay thick upon the turnip-fields, and the labourers might be heard whistling as they trudged off to their work; the dreary tramp, tramp, tramp of children's footsteps might be heard also, going in gangs to the far-off task of stone-picking. He did not wake Maddio, who slept like a year-old baby, but crept down-stairs, knapsack in hand, and having breakfasted with his host, the ratcatcher, started off for St. Beowulf's Bury. He had gone about a hundred yards when the sound of hurried steps and a young voice made him look back.

It was little Mattie, the ratcatcher's daughter, as pretty a rosebud of a woman as you would find in all the rustic homes of Culpho, just sixteen, all dimples and blushes and awkwardnesses, who held the two foreign gentlemen in as much awe, despite their simple ways, as if they had been John Wesley and the great Suwarrow; the two heroes whose biographies formed the bulk of the home library.

"What's the matter, little Mattie?" he said. "I left nothing behind me. Ah! I forgot to pay as much as I owed, perhaps?"

He brought out a handful of money, the sum-total of his worldly goods.

She came to a standstill at his feet, like a pink-and-white blossom that drifts to the ground.

"Oh, no!" she said, kneeling down upon

one knee, with inexpressible childlike grace. "But you forgot to take any food with you, and father says you are going all the way to Ipswich."

It had been Mattie's office to pack the bread and cold meat with which René and Maddio usually provided themselves before setting out on an excursion. She now unfolded her apron, and brought forward a little bundle of provisions, and a couple of large gold and amber coloured pears, looking so shy, so pretty, and so persuasive, that he not only accepted the gifts, but taking her rosy chin in his hands, gave her a kiss. What was it? A careless kiss given to a pretty child on a sunshiny morning. René smiled down upon her, thinking he had done, if not a common, a knightly thing, but the girl turned scarlet, dropped her long eyelashes over tear-wet, affronted eyes, emptied her apron on the ground, and scuttled away like a scared rabbit. He called her name, whistled, went back a few paces, paused, watched in vain. Mattie had not been to the Sunday-school all these years, under the sharp eye of Reverend Madams, without having learned how to behave herself. She would tell father, she said to herself at first, shutting herself up in her bedroom, pouting and crying. To be kissed like a flaunting creature at a fair, forsooth! and she a motherless girl! the best-conducted of Mr. Whitelock's confirmation class! But, on second and calmer thoughts, she decided to keep her secret, and all that golden autumn day was longing to see the culprit again whose sin against her had been so sweet and so unpardonable.

Meantime René, having dismissed pretty Mattie from his thoughts—the man steals forbidden fruit a hundred times, and forgets; the woman but once, and remembers for ever!—was making the best of his way to St. Beowulf's.

His heart sank within him when he thought of the Paradise he had left behind, and the desert towards which he was turning his face. For the last fifteen years Ingaretha had been the passion and poetry of his wandering life. Tossed hither and thither on the sea of political and social trouble, her presence was ever the Bower of Bliss in which he rested, drinking from clear streams of joy and contentment. In prison—and René had been in prison many times for various displays of democratic principle—the expectation of seeing her again, quite as much as the desire of furthering his views, made the burden of the day tolerable, and the thought of the morrow welcome. If sometimes the fearful

sufferings of his youth came upon him with such force as to dull the sense of hope and enjoyment, an unlooked-for kindness on her part—a written word, a message, a flower—brought back a better mood. He had come to England, on Monsieur Sylvestre's invitation, to find life enchanting. But the dream was over, the vision had faded, the story was brought to sudden end. How could he stay, seeing that he loved Ingaretha and that she cared for him? All that was best and manliest in his nature pleaded on her behalf. He knew well enough that she was too generous to bid him go. She would never bid his fellow-wanderers do this, however much trouble they might bring upon her. Was not that a sufficient reason for the resolve to which he had bound himself? These revolutionary ideas of his leader's—these uncompromising theories of liberty, equality, and fraternity—these golden Utopias of happy toil and universal well-being—could only be carried out at her risk and at her cost. Socialism was not a Midas turning everything into gold. Socialism had knocked at her door, a beggar in rags, and she had fed, clothed, caressed it. Let all the world be made tools of in the good cause, he said, only let Ingaretha be spared.

Here in this rich, happy England there was room enough for revolutionists. Ingaretha lived like some fairy-tale princess, surrounded by bowers and lawns and gardens, only having to hold out her hand for the thing she longed for; but outside her park-gates, existed ill-fed, ignorant, superstitious peasants, whom no mere Lady Bountiful could have formed into happy, rational, dignified beings. She might build cottages for them, distribute doles, charge herself with the care of the sick and the aged, make feasts and festivals, open schools for the children, talk to both men and women in the friendly fashion, offer a cordial hand to the first she met as she came out of church on Sunday. In doing all this, she did well and nobly, but the wrongs of labour and poverty were not so to be put right. Here and there, under such good influences, individual debasement and individual wretchedness might vanish; the fundamental injustice of the social system, which, like the worm in the heart of a rose, gnawed at the prosperity of a free and beautiful country, would still remain untouched.

As he thought of these things, wondering what Ingaretha would do with her life—that inner life from which Sunday-schools and cottagers' homes and parish reformation stood

far apart—the question arose, what should he do with his own?

He thought of one or two friends of his, members of the fraternity of Fourierists: this settled in the Far West, that on the borders of the Sahara, a third earning his bread and sowing the good seed in Alsatia, a fourth—farther away than all—in the farthest settlements of Russia. To which should he turn? They were all his brothers; their loaf would be his loaf, their bed his bed, their purse his purse till the last. His coming would be received with joy, his departure would call forth tears.

But he hesitated. An ardent Socialist, a believer in the reconstruction of society by means of association, he still held back from making a fresh experiment. The heart-breaking experiences of the Algerian colony were fresh in his mind. He had neither forgotten the plague of locusts, nor the famine, nor the fever. He said to himself that it were better to let the rich fields of speculation and theory lie fallow for awhile, and till, sow, and garner in a crop of the practical and tangible, no matter how scanty.

He had not spent two months and a half in England for nothing. He saw that this so-called Socialism, at which the respectable masses take such affront, was no foreign plant, striking unwilling root into uncongenial soil, but a force, vigorous and healthy as the growth of a forest oak, whose adamant roots were spreading wider and wider, whose branches towered over lesser trees with majesty, whose crown and flower of prime maturity the world had not yet seen. 'This Trades' Unionism, this International Association of Working Men, this leaguering together of the upholders of free labour, of co-operation, of peace, and of liberty, this outcry for education, for political rights of both sexes and all grades, for toleration in thought, for emancipation from theological thralldom, but expressed more or less definitely the dreams of Owen, of St. Simon, of Fourier, of Proudhon, and the noble brotherhood of Reformers. Could a disciple of any one of these do better than throw in his lot with that of the working man? whether of France, Germany, or England, mattered little so long as Liberty was their creed, and Equality of education their watchword. A life devoted to such a cause might be dreary compared to that he had lived for the last few months, the dweller in sunny lands, the friend and companion of such a woman as Ingaretha, but life fortunately was a thing of decades, not of centuries, and life would draw to an end.

After all, he said to himself, he was a working man, ay, lower in the social scale than that—a gipsy, a vagabond, an outcast! He had tasted the bitterness of hunger and thirst, of cold and nakedness, of homelessness and exile. He had earned his bread with the sweat of his brow, his hands had never been white or soft. Wherever he went, he found working men whose existence had been luxurious compared to his own. Surely, he would be received with open arms into the guild of the struggling and the oppressed proletariat of any nation? He would serve the good cause all the more effectually since he had no other ties. He had neither parent, nor wife, neither sister, nor brother. In all the cemeteries of the world, there was no grave to which he was in duty bound to carry immortelles and flowers. When he died, Ingaretha would weep a little, and his good comrades, Euphrosyne, Maddio, and Monsieur Sylvestre, would be sure to shed tears; but how little difference it would make to them!

All these thoughts came and went as he hastened that autumn morning to St. Beowulf's. The field of purple beet or bright green turnip glowed in the early sunshine, the cleared harvest fields looked golden against the intense blue sky, the hedges were shining with ripe berries, black and red; nature seemed as gay as if it were spring.

From St. Beowulf's to Harwich was an easy ride by rail, and there he found the time-honoured *River Queen* on the point of starting for Blackwall.

René's self-given title of a working man must be taken with certain reservations. He knew well enough that his membership of such a guild hung upon a thread, and that the inherited proletariat of which he boasted could be easily disproved. In the first place, as Ingaretha even had gathered from his oft-times too reticent lips, he was born no beggar boy, no progeny of those who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, but the son of a proud and unfortunate French exile—sole democrat of an aristocratic family—whose wanderings had ended in Rome. Did he accept Ingaretha's pity and gold pieces? Yes, but he could have had gold pieces in plenty—the less said about pity the better—if he had chosen to return to his own people and say to them, 'I am a renegade, like him who begot me. Forgive my sins and his. Give me food, shelter, name, and I will never discredit you by loving liberty and the people too well.'

Occasionally he had let fall, chancewise, some inkling of this discarded birthright;

once or twice he had named names; to Madame Sylvestre he had even gone further than this; but on the surface, and before all, he was a working man, owning no other kinship.

CHAPTER XVI.—THE GATES OF EDEN ARE OPENED.

OF course Ingaretha knew well enough why René went away, and was a little glad and very sorry both for his sake and her own. He went to spare her. It was generous, self-devoted, nay, noble of him. He had left behind him a happy life, friends, the woman he held dear, and set out as an emigrant seeking a new home and a new country. True friend René! If she could only have recalled him, to say, 'Be happy!'

But though his absence weighed upon her spirits, and for days and weeks her laugh seemed to belong to some one else, and silence often took possession of her unawares, she resolutely set to work on behalf of those left behind. The negotiations for Pilgrim's Hatch occupied much of her time and thoughts during the few weeks preceding Michaelmas-day—to ingoing and outgoing farmers the most important day of the year. What with the lawyer, the farmer, and the farm-steward—for Mrs. Minifie's secret naturally exploded in a moment of wrath, and Mr. Minifie now sat on the council board—she had a hard battle to fight. Grindstone wouldn't sharpen knife, knife wouldn't cut stick, stick wouldn't beat pig, pig wouldn't go to market, and dame couldn't get home to-night. The farmer, egged on by Mr. Minifie, set a high price on his farm, and stuck to it. The lawyer, determined to keep Ingaretha's money in her pocket, set a lower figure, and stuck to it also: and Michaelmas-day drew nearer and nearer. At last matters were brought to a climax by a concession on the part of the lady.

"Dear Mr. Mede," she said to her old friend coaxingly, "let us hire the farm. It is only seventy acres, a kind of bigger garden, after all. I don't want to throw money into the fire; but I do want to make my friends happy. Let me stock it; six or seven hundred pounds, I think Mr. Minifie said, would do that and a little more; and surely I can afford to lend a friend seven hundred pounds."

"Give it, you mean," growled Mr. Mede.

She laid her hand on the old man's arm insinuatingly.

"Oh, Mr. Mede, would it be a crime to do that? And my uncle lately left me a

thousand pounds to buy trinkets with, which I have not touched."

"Well, my dear, I suppose you must have your way. But, mind, Minifie sees to the stock, crop, and valuation. Minifie supervises—ahem—these friends of yours. Everything will go to rack and ruin else."

Ingaretha coloured, and started back with an affronted look.

"I couldn't accept an Eden on those terms," she said.

"I can offer no better, and now or never is your time for accepting them."

At first Ingaretha was disposed to gather up her riding skirts, and go her ways, never to speak of the matter to Mr. Mede any more. But friendship for her old adviser prevailed; and seeing her so amenable to reason, and so sweet and respectful to himself, the lawyer temporised. First the one ceded an inch, then the other an inch, and so on, till each had got, if not as much ground as was asked for, at least as much as could reasonably be expected.

Then there was Mr. Minifie to confront. Ingaretha met him with a childishly crest-fallen air.

"Mr. Mede will have you mixed up in the matter," she said, with an attempt at a smile; and that was all.

The two forthwith rushed *in medias res*, Ingaretha ignoring the triumphant little twinkle that, for the life of him, Mr. Minifie could not suppress. It is true that, but for his wife's by-play in the first instance, the farm would have been his own; he hardly grudged it now, seeing the conditions imposed upon those who had forestalled him.

"I always warned you not to interfere with my affairs, Janey," he said, as soon as Ingaretha was gone. "You see what has come of it."

"Things might have been worse," Mrs. Minifie retorted. "You hoarded up so much money, that I am afraid the ground will open, and swallow you up as you walk along. Remember Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. The loss of this farm is perhaps a last chance of salvation to you."

"Janey, do leave off preaching," began Mr. Minifie, too elated just then to quarrel.

"Give me some of my money, then, and I will be quiet for a year. Only twenty pounds of my own money!" begged the poor woman, with a pitiful mixture of entreaty and reproach.

"Twenty pounds!" echoed Mr. Minifie, opening his eyes. "What on earth would you do with it?"

"It is a very little to ask for, and I am getting old. I shall soon be too old to care about anything. We can't carry our money to the grave with us. Why not enjoy it now?"

"Well, what do you call enjoying it?"

He looked so good-natured, that Mrs. Minifie took heart, and pleaded her cause more earnestly.

"You can't say that I have ever been an extravagant wife, Charlie. I dress no better than a curate's wife. I am content to eat beans and bacon day after day. I keep no company. But twenty pounds now and then would enable me to give such useful little presents to my friends!"

"Oh!" was Mr. Minifie's answer; and straightway turned upon his heel, she calling after him, in her rage and disappointment—

"I will steal it! I will pick your pockets like a thief! I will have a little of my own money by fair means or foul!"

She stamped with rage and cried, poor creature, at thinking of the gifts she had intended to make—a silk dress for pretty Amy, a doll's-house for little Bina, a Sunday frock for all the children, and something useful and pretty for the dear foreigners, Monsieur and Madame Sylvestre. Her life was so dull and emotionless, that the idea of affording these kindly souls a momentary elation had been like food, psalm-reading, and poetry to her for days past. Ah! how happy she had been in the by-gone days of freedom and old-maidhood! Then the golden sovereigns came and went like good angels, doing their daily work of duty and beneficence. What *protégés* she had in that unfettered, careless time! What friends amongst the children, what adorers amongst the needy, what allies amongst the helpless! And now she stood alone and friendless as a withered tree, to whom nature had denied all prospect of flower and fruit. This blessed state of marriage that poets and romancists extolled to heaven—this union of two lives, two souls, and two hearts in one—might be to some a beautiful reality or a dream; to herself it had been a farce, a tragedy, the contemplation of which shamed her before God and man.

There was nothing to do now but bear it. Fortunately, when the bitterness of her last mortification was fresh in her mind, came a kind little note from Ingaretha. Mr. Minifie had promised to see that the stock should be good and abundant; but there was the house to furnish and make ready. Would Mrs. Minifie help her in making these preparations? The two ladies worked hard, and

achieved wonders. An old-fashioned farmhouse, with due reservation be it said, is often as comfortless a domicile as a caravan-sary in the wilds of the desert. Good drinking water is not to be had within a mile; bedrooms are without fire-places; floors are so uneven as to give one the idea of an earthquake; the apple-chamber, being situated in the middle of the house, and filled with apples from Michaelmas till May-day, emits an overpowering and monotonous savour. The cheese-room may not happen to be at a respectful distance from the sleeping apartments. The parlour has generally a brick-floor, pleasant enough in July, but far from grateful at Christmas. Money works small miracles; good sense works great one. It was quite marvellous how soon the little homestead of Pilgrim's Hatch became transformed under Ingaretha's supervision.

As yet not a syllable had been breathed to Monsieur and Madame Sylvestre about their good luck; but on the eve of Michaelmas-day, Ingaretha ordered her little pony-carriage to be brought to the door, and, looking radiant, invited them to drive with her to a farm that might suit them.

"A very modest little place," she said; "but I think you would not be dissatisfied with such a beginning."

Monsieur Sylvestre delighted in handling the reins as much as a schoolboy, and, by this time, had occasioned many a mischief to Ingaretha's horses, carriages, and harness. Without waiting for an invitation, he jumped into the driver's seat, flourished the whip, and drove off after his own showy but unsafe fashion.

"Any beginning will satisfy me, my dear young lady," he said—"a field, an acre, nay, a garden. Rome was not built in a day; and the glorious harvest of Socialism may be sowed chancewise by vagrants like myself, as flower-seed by humble insects."

"Mind the gate!" said Ingaretha.

"Think," he continued, waiting impatiently till the park gate was opened, "how the face of all things might be changed in this favoured spot if the ideas of the divine Fourier were disseminated. The earth brings forth abundantly, and her fruits are duly gathered in; but by whom? By those who believe in the nobility of toil? By those who share in its rewards? By those who feel themselves members of one great brotherhood? No; rather by those whom poverty and ignorance have so degraded, that in their persons, toil becomes degradation; by those who, far

from sharing the first-fruits of the earth, are content with the shells and husks thereof; by those who have no common fellowship, except with deprivation, and wrong, and misery——”

“We are driving into the ditch!” interrupted Ingaretha.

The ditch was avoided, and the speaker continued:—

“I thought you English loved freedom, till I came to live among you. What does your much-vaunted liberty amount to? The poor are free, I grant. Your lords of the manors and grand seigneurs no longer possess the right of pit and cross-way. You cannot bury your peasants alive, or gibbet them if they happen to displease you. But is not ignorance the worst of slavery? Better not to be born, saith Plato, than to be untaught. And in that slavery you have kept them for centuries bound hand and foot.”

“*Mon Dieu*, we are overturned!” cried Madame Sylvestre in great terror, and, true enough, the little carriage was on the point of running into a heap of timber lying by the roadside when Ingaretha’s timely seizure of the reins averted the catastrophe.

“I lose all patience,” continued Monsieur Sylvestre, “when I read what your orators and your journalists, not to speak of your historians, say about this same liberty of the people. Eyes have they, but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not. With such spectacles as the pauperism of London and the misery of Manchester ever before them, they still hug this delusion to their souls—Liberty of the people.”

“Oh! we are in the miller’s cart!” cried Ingaretha. This time the collapse was inevitable. Don Quixote’s onslaught upon the windmills was hardly fiercer than this charge of Ingaretha’s pony upon the miller’s lazy cob.

There was a scrimmage and a great dispersion of dust, from which emerged, first the ladies, then the drivers, then the animals, all looking more or less rueful. The harness having been temporarily adjusted and the miller’s ruffled temper smoothed down by Ingaretha’s apologies, the little party made the rest of their journey on foot.

The short bright autumn afternoon was drawing to a close when they reached the farm. All the front windows glowed fiery red in the rays of the declining sun; the orchard was lustrous with ripened pear, apple, and

plum; Michaelmas daisies, cabbage roses, and other homely flowers brightened the little garden; the meadows lay bathed in yellow light; beautiful white ducks were swimming in the pond; broods of plump late chickens strayed here and there.

Ah, how happy was Ingaretha as she led her enchanted friends over the peaceful place, pointing out this thing and that! first the dairy with its cool marble slabs and wooden milk troughs, shining and white, its bright red jars half a yard high, full of salted cream for the next day’s churning; then the pantries, airy, dusky, capacious; then the kitchen and the back-kitchen, its red brick floors just washed down; then the apple-chamber, and the little bedrooms, old-fashioned, small-windowed, built anyhow, with big cupboards and unaccountable ascents and descents, and perfumes of honeysuckle coming in at every opening; last of all, she led them into what she called, after country fashion, the best parlour of the house.

Exclamations of surprise fell from her companions, and no wonder. Here were soft carpets, book-shelves, books, pictures, a cottage piano, one or two statuettes, a writing-table, a velvet arm-chair, a blue-grey paper with a dash of gold in it, gold fringed curtains to the little bay-window that looked pleasantly on to the shady orchard.

“What taste, what luxury!” cried Euphrosyne. “Surely this farmer can have been no common man!”

Her husband was turning over the books that lay upon the table with extreme inquisitiveness.

“Can I believe my eyes!” he cried delightedly. “Here is Robert Owen’s ‘Book of the Moral World,’ and that book of books, ‘La Philosophie Positive,’ and the entire works of Charles Fourier!”

He uttered an involuntary ejaculation, held a volume to the window, looked again and again, then called to Euphrosyne to look also. His own name was written on the title-page!

No one knew how it happened, but the secret was out without a word. Ingaretha gave a hand to each, half laughing, half crying. They kissed her, they kissed each other in a passionate mood of hope, joy, and gratitude; and when the first surprise had passed away, talked tremblingly of their good fortune, dreading, like happy dreamers, lest the spell should soon be broken!

PART IV.

CHAPTER XVII.—FIRST DAYS IN PARADISE.



THE prodigal son doubtless felthimself a wholly different creature when arrayed in the purple robe, the shoes, and the gold ring, and was assuredly differently appraised by his neighbours. Good repute is of more account than

hidden nobility. We are valued less for what we are than for what others think us. Ingaretha's beneficent care of her friends worked so well that they soon found themselves on the high road to popularity. It did not trouble people much how they got to Pilgrim's Hatch; there they were, vagabonds and hangers-on no longer, but respectable tithe-payers, having a pew at church, cows, horses, and pigs, good furniture, a little pony and gig, and all kinds of minor title-deeds to respectability. Maddio—we need hardly say—that Maddio had left his narrow quarters at the ratcatcher's and joined his friends, was in a state of joy impossible to describe. This little farm was surely a corner of the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey; he might weep for René now and then, but he felt sure that René would come back, and meantime, he could not resist enjoying to the full the good things the gods had provided.

Not the least of these seemed the flattering homage of the neighbourhood. For now was seen the phenomenon of a conservative and church-going population hugging to its bosom the last-born child of revolutions and heresies, namely, socialism; if not the socialism most generally understood by the name, socialism still, ardent, aggressive, undaunted, armed to the teeth with pen instead of sword. sworn to break down the

unjust barriers society had set up, to free labour from the curse of ignorance, weakness from the toils of power, poverty from the oppression of wealth, to reconstruct society, in fact, by elevating the humble and pulling down the mighty. The first to pay its respects to reinstated worth was the church, represented in the person of Mr. Whitelock. In the good rector's eyes Monsieur Sylvestre, the tatterdemalion democrat, had been merely a soul to be saved; but Monsieur Sylvestre transformed into a tithe-payer, possible churchwarden, voter for the borough also, was a power to be conciliated. Accordingly, he presented himself at Pilgrim's Hatch with propitiatory gifts in the shape of a couple of sixpenny hymn-books and half-a-dozen tracts, which he offered in so unconscious, nay, superior a manner, as to disarm the criticism of his well-bred *protégés*. Monsieur Sylvestre made his grand bow, Euphrosyne her best curtsy, Maddio smiled and nodded.

Then there seemed nothing to be done or said.

"I hope we shall be good friends," Mr. Whitelock began after a long pause. "It is my earnest wish to live at peace with all mankind, especially my parishioners."

"We are the most harmless people in the world," answered Monsieur Sylvestre. "The revolution we want to bring about is entirely a peaceable one."

"You want to bring about a revolution?" asked the rector turning red.

"The most peaceable in the world. Don't be alarmed, my dear sir. Far be it from us to pursue the blood and iron policy of bygone conquerors. We wage no murderous battles, we make no allies of tyrants and slave-drivers. The inkpot is our only weapon, the printing-press our only arsenal—these in a free country like your England are omnipotent."

This speech a little eased the rector's mind.

"I was thinking revolutionists could find little to do here," he said. "It seems to me that the people have too much of everything already,—liberty, education, charity. The rich demoralize the poor by being too good to them."

"We reformers think that the poor demoralize the rich by being too good to them. There is the difference," Monsieur Sylvestre answered suavely. "But these things will be set right in time. You, Monsieur le rector,

will wake one day to find the divine law of equality established, the dignity of labour recognised, and men and women working together harmoniously in the cause of progress and humanity."

"I will put that in my next sermon if you will allow me," said the rector, bringing out his note-book. "I differ slightly from your sentiments, but the words will impress my congregation."

"Ah! Monsieur le rector, only let me have your school-room for an evening, and I will enunciate my views in a manner that shall enthral even these dull-headed villagers."

"I cannot do that, at least at present. Put you will oblige me very greatly by reading the lessons on Sundays sometimes."

"I shall be enchanted to obey the summons of Monsieur le rector."

"And perhaps Madame will help with the singing?"

"My wife will, I am sure, do all in her power; and my friend here, Signor Maddio, though he has not much voice, delights in making himself useful."

"Really, it is most kind of you to propose this," said the rector, shaking hands all round. "We expect the bishop here in the autumn, and I am very anxious that my choir should not be found inferior to the others. I shall expect you at the school-room to-morrow night at eight o'clock for practice there, and I hope in any case we may meet at church next Sunday."

Thus ended the rector's visit of ceremony. In the wake of the church followed the world, represented by a widow lady and her two daughters, the first pensive and a poetess, the last spiritual and enthusiastic, as behoved the daughters of a poetess to be. These ladies—especially the elder one—knew a great deal of the world, and only fell in love with it now and then. They had all travelled in Italy, could speak French and play classic music, which qualification, added to a dilution of blue blood in their veins, raised them above the only society within their reach. Here stood opportunity with a long forelock of pure gold, and they clutched it eagerly. A colony of polished foreigners, able to play and sing, to quote poetry and sketch in water-colours, was a godsend indeed to three rather lonely ladies doing gentility on a hundred and fifty pounds a year.

It was something new to them to be invited to tea by strangers, to be indulged with stories of adventure, with dissertations upon things lying beyond the horizon of

daily life, to be made much of in spite of their shabby silks, to be smiled at from and to the heart.

"Do not think," said Monsieur Sylvestre, as he proudly led the way through the poultry-yard, orchard, and dairy, "that we intend to keep all these good things to ourselves. Fortune having bestowed bountifully, shall we distribute with niggardliness? Rather let us give with the left hand what the right receives. Thus, and thus only, can we propagate our ideas."

"In a few weeks," put in Maddio, rubbing his hands joyfully, "you will see our school-room built and my work begun. We open it to young and old, church-goers and dissenters. If there are ladies wanting careers in England, we can offer them such as are not wanting in temptation."

Now it happened that careers were just what the ladies in question anticipated, feeling as if they were being slowly upheaved from a glacial period of deathlike monotony to living, pulsated, varying life. They went home and spent the rest of the evening in searching for such words as *Solidarité*, *Phalanstère*, and so on, in their French dictionary.

After the church and the world came, of course, the flesh and the devil, represented by Mr. Minifie, who was far too wary to let spite and disappointment stand in the way of self-interest. It was Miss Meadowcourt's hobby to squander her money upon adventures; it was his business to humour her hobbies. So he rode to Pilgrim's Hatch with the express purpose of paying suit to Madame Sylvestre, and said a dozen officious and good-natured things which the poor lady received gratefully. She thought affairs must go well so long as they remained under such scrutiny as Mr. Minifie's.

Mrs. Minifie, of course, came, bringing the curate's wife, Bina, Sammie, and Pennie in her mausoleum upon wheels. The children found it as good as going to see Ingaretha, what with the plums, the poultry-yard, and the plentiful supplies of cake.

"Will you come to my school?" asked Maddio of the two younger children, as he sat with one upon each knee.

"Sammie, you speak first," said Pennie, her mouth being full of cake.

"Well, you will have done before me, you know," Sammie answered, with an epicurean look at the delicious morsel in his hand. "Yes, Maddie, I will come to your school if you promise me two things."

"And what are they?"

"You pay me a penny a week for setting a pattern to the other boys, and let me do as I like with it. Mrs. Pollard gives me whole shillings, but makes me promise to put them in the missionary plate, and I like nuts and oranges better than the heathens," Sammie said pathetically.

"And I will come to your school if you let me always sit near Sammie," Pennie said.

"Nuts and oranges!" cried Sammie, in a reproachful voice.

"And what must I do for Miss Bina?" asked Maddio.

"Bina doesn't care about anything so long as we little ones behave well," Pennie said.

"She's not nearly so greedy as we are."

"She ought to be," was on Maddio's tongue; for poor little Bina's precocious conscientiousness and self-devotion troubled him greatly. He merely said—

"Bina shall help me and sit at the teachers' table. They get nuts and oranges sometimes."

"Without learning lessons!" cried Pennie, opening her large eyes. "Oh, Sammie!"

Soon Amy came to call her chicks together, and then the business of packing up for the return home began. The little ones were stowed away in cosy corners, when Monsieur Sylvestre appeared, carrying a well-filled basket.

"I cannot let you go, dear Madame Greenfield," he said, with a smile of exhilaration, "empty-handed guest from miserly-hearted host. Accept these simple pledges of future friendship and mutual good offices."

Amy blushed and smiled ruefully, stammering out a few words of thanks as best she could. His liberality touched while it mortified her. How could she repay it? How could she refuse it?

"I see a pair of chicken's legs!" cried Sammie, peering into the basket.

"And I see a round parcel that smells like cake," said Pennie delightedly.

"And ducks' eggs lie in the corner. Oh, mamma, is it too late to set the hen?" Bina asked, with visions of ducklings swimming before her eyes.

As soon as the visitors were gone, Monsieur Sylvestre dropped on the sofa with a sigh of fatigue.

"Suppose, my child," he said to Euphrosyne, "we have some supper. What with rising at three o'clock in the morning, working in the sun, and entertaining so many kind friends, I feel inclined now to eat and repose."

Euphrosyne laid the cloth with alacrity; the little damsel-of-all-work was sent into the garden to fetch fruit and salad; Maddio

proceeded to the cellar to draw some ale. Soon Euphrosyne returned with a rueful face: "Surely," she said, "thieves have burst into the house. There is not a vestige of the stores that delighted my heart this morning. The eggs, the cold fowl, the ham, have all clean vanished!"

"Make your mind easy, dear little wife," said the philosopher. "The thief is myself; and I but transferred the good things to others more needy."

"But surely, dear husband, the cheese was not put into Amy's basket, nor the loaves I baked this very morning, nor the pastry of which you are so fond?"

"Have no fear, they are all well bestowed," Monsieur Sylvestre answered, yawning. "Our good ploughman's firstborn son was christened on Sunday, and shall the happy parents not feast at my expense? Of what good is it for us to live in the midst of plenty, if we withhold the share that is due to our brothers?"

Here Maddio appeared, bearing an empty jug in his hand, with an expression of the blankest dismay.

"It is but the third day after broaching our cask, and lo! it is empty!" he said, looking from one to the other for an explanation.

Monsieur Sylvestre's tranquil mood was not to be ruffled.

"Well, my children," he said, "let us eat of the fruit from our garden and drink of the water from our spring. If the supply is not equal to our appetites, at least we sit down to our scanty board with a clear conscience."

Euphrosyne returned to the pantry on an expedition of discovery, and brought forth of the remnants that remained a few crusts of bread and some cold vegetables. Maddio fried the potatoes and prepared a salad. They supped as if nothing had happened, and went to bed hungry, with a good grace.

CHAPTER XVIII.—THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIETY IS BEGUN.

MONSIEUR SYLVESTRE'S ambition was far from satisfied. He valued his new position much more as a stepping-stone to social power than as a guarantee of material comfort. To eat, drink, and lie soft were trifles compared to the noble task of sowing the seeds of progress and humanitarian principle. Who could tell how soon the individual prosperity in which Euphrosyne and Maddio delighted, might vanish? But universal truth could never die; and to be an apostle of it, however humble, was what he craved above all things. How could he here best spread the truth? The parish

church was shut to him, the parish chapel was shut to him. If he distributed pamphlets to the unlettered, they would not understand them. If he published books for the educated, they would not buy them. He felt rich enough to print, publish, and give away any amount of books, but he knew well enough how feeble were written symbols in comparison to living words. To preach to the people was his only chance of making converts. He cogitated and cogitated.

There was a shabby-genteel residence in the village, too magnificent for the poor and too incommodious for the rich, which had been untenanted for years, and on this he cast longing eyes. It belonged to Ingaretha, who had alternately proposed to use it as a sanatorium for sick children, a village library, an almshouse for old women, &c.; as yet none of these schemes had been carried out. Would Ingaretha fall into his plan, and turn the shabby-genteel residence into a hall of art, science, and recreation? Ingaretha consented, and straightway wrote a cheque for a hundred pounds to cover necessary expenses. Monsieur Sylvestre, Maddio, and Euphrosyne—the former excellent carpenters, painters, and masons, the latter a good upholsterer—set to work, aided by village workmen, and, as if by magic, the thing was done! The dining-room, kitchen, and drawing-room had been thrown into one, forming a tolerably spacious, if not lofty, lecture hall; by a similar process the upper rooms had been turned into one large reading-room. The walls of the hall were hung with portraits and illuminated mottoes from various socialist and philosophic writers, old and new. Prominently printed in enormous red and gold letters, was Comte's famous maxim, "The only right of man is to do his duty;" above it were the words of Babœuf, "In an equitable state of society there ought to be neither rich nor poor." Fourier's "Treatise on Association," and the "Chants du Travailleur," had been ransacked for telling phrases, as well as the columns of the *Beehive* and the *Democratic*. Among the portraits, for the most part cut out of books, were those of Fanny Wright, who preached socialism to the negroes; Madame Clarisse Vigoureux, an ardent disciple and impassioned writer, who ministered to Fourier in his old age and poverty; the beautiful, audacious *Enfantin*, and other noteworthy apostles of latter-day creeds. The ceiling was covered with a series of fresco paintings, representing the apotheosis of labour according to the

notions of Fourier. In one corner might be seen a stately team of oxen unyoked drawing a plough to the sound of a child's flute; in a second, bands of ladies and gentlemen in appropriate costumes were performing the work of a harvest-field, and so on; the centre-piece, representing an enormous palace-like building, surrounded by galleries and flower-gardens, under which was written *Phalanstery, or Associated Home*. The library, as yet in embryo, seemed likely to educate the village youth after a somewhat novel fashion. Tracts, good books, *i.e.*, biographies and travel, interspersed with religious and moral reflections, were wholly wanting; instead, were such writings as De Foe's *Political Tracts*, Owen's *Rational System*, Tocqueville's *State of France before the Revolution*, and other books calculated to inspire democratic feeling.

"I must teach the young people to think," said Monsieur Sylvestre, as he triumphantly led Ingaretha from shelf to shelf.

"Teach them to read first," she answered, with a smile.

"Ah! that difficulty did not occur to me."

She promised to send a supply of spelling-books, and suggested that maps might take the place of some of the portraits. He conceded one point after another till there seemed a fair chance of the village library proving practically useful.

The ceremony of opening was the next question. Ingaretha proposed a sumptuous tea for the poor people by way of commencement, and a musical entertainment, with dissolving views and *tableaux vivants* to follow. Monsieur Sylvestre assented to the first, but thought that the after-entertainment should be of a more intellectual nature. He wanted, in fact, to deliver a discourse. As he spoke English well, and was largely gifted with eloquence, there seemed nothing to say against this proposition, except that no one would understand him.

"It is very impertinent of me to say so," Ingaretha said; "but indeed, dear friend, you will never succeed in reaching the understandings of these poor people. They can comprehend what Mr. Whitelock says on Sunday, because he has said it a thousand times. What you have to say will be as mysterious as if you read the Koran in Arabic to them."

"Then let us gather together the enlightened, and so penetrate the lower strata of society from above. I cannot give up my pet project of opening your Hall of Arts



"WHEN INGARETHA APPEARED, LEANING ON THE ARM OF MONSIEUR SYLVESTRE."

with a discourse, if worthier orators are not to be found."

He said this with a self-conscious smile, knowing well enough that the divine gift of eloquence seldom descends upon country parsons, and, if not upon them, upon whom, in isolated country places? The Wesleyan open-air preachers would say more and speak louder, but there arose no Wesley among them to stir the hearts of this people.

Only grant him a hearing, and he felt sure that he could charm the senses of the obtuse villagers as the sirens charmed the mariners of old. Ingaretha yielded to his importunities, and sat down to word a form of gracious invitation to the upper ten thousand of St. Beowulf. A village library and lecture room was to be opened on such and such a day, she wrote, and her friend, Monsieur Sylvestre, was to give a lecture—

"On the Perfectibility of the Human race by means of Socialism," put in Monsieur Sylvestre, looking over her shoulder.

"No; I dare not use the last word; you would be looked upon as a Mormon."

"On the Re-modelling of Society upon the system of Phalansteries?"

"Nobody would have the faintest conception of your meaning. You must choose something simpler."

"Well, then, I will lecture on the Millennium."

"That will do."

Accordingly the upper ten were invited to hear a discourse upon the Millennium. This had a proper theological look about it, and life being dull in these parts, anything in the shape of distraction was seized upon greedily. They accepted. The programme was of the most original kind. First came the tea for the workmen, their wives, and children down-stairs, then some old English ditties with accompaniments were to be sung, an opening address read by Mr. Greenfield, Monsieur Sylvestre's discourse on the Millennium, finally, tea, ices, and conversation.

No pains were spared to make the occasion as gala-like as possible. It was a cardinal point of Monsieur Sylvestre's doctrine, and of Ingaretha's also, that the poor should enjoy the sight of beautiful things as well as the rich; accordingly, flowers, coloured wax-lights, bright draperies, silver-gilt epergnes, and plate were provided in abundance. Every bench was covered with scarlet cloth, every foot of floor with carpet. On the staircase were placed statues, half hidden by flowers and orange-trees, banners of gay

colours were suspended across the ceilings, festoons of laurel and ivy hung from beam to beam. Music was provided in abundance, piano, violin, violoncello. And in order that nothing should be wanting to add to the gay aspect of the evening, the ladies were entreated to come in full dress; even the labouring men received a charge to wear flowers in their buttonholes, and bright neck-ribbons and new caps had been distributed to the women. The inauguration of a reign of enlightenment and happiness, so said Monsieur Sylvestre, could not be too gay and joyful.

At length the long-looked-for evening arrived. The children had feasted, and gone home. Fathers and mothers had taken their seats with a serious Sunday look on their faces. Fearing lest the noise of carriage wheels should disturb the flow of his oratory, Monsieur Sylvestre had given orders that straw should be laid down the road for a hundred paces each way, greatly to the amazement of the multitude. Quietly as mice, therefore, burden after burden of silk and muslin—for the ladies came in evening-dress—was deposited at the door. First the Miss Stapletons, like puffy poppies striped red and white; next Mrs. Anstruther, in green satin, round, smooth, and creaseless, like an apple in harvest-time; and Lady Victoria Pennington, whose dress did not signify; and a host of ladies dressed after the manner of fashion-books, and gentlemen after the manner of footmen, as the delectable taste of the day dictated. But it was wonderful in the sight of the villagers. The old men and women wiped away tears of emotion at the fine sight, and when Ingaretha appeared, leaning on the arm of Monsieur Sylvestre, dressed in white silk, tunic, belt and sleeves embroidered with gold, and a golden flower in her hair, their enthusiasm knew no bounds. Was ever young lady so good, so beautiful, and so beloved? If only all the rich were like her, life would become a heaven upon earth, they thought. Preliminaries over, Monsieur Sylvestre took his place and prepared to speak. He saw at a glance that very little of what he had to say would be understood. But what of that? His voice was musical, his command of language perfect, his elocution almost unrivalled. He knew that if he could not reach the understandings of his audience, at least he might fire their imaginations. For some minutes he stood, drawn up to his full height, surveying his audience; and if the effects of that gaze were not quite so magnetic as he ex-

pected, at least it awakened curiosity and interest.

Three months of prosperity had added wonderfully to Monsieur Sylvestre's personal attractions. As he stood thus, his head thrown back, the silky white locks falling on his shoulders, his large bright eyes kindling with fervour, his brow calm and majestic, his figure easy and noble, it would be difficult to conceive a more striking presence. There was, moreover, in spite of the great dignity of his carriage, a certain bewitching playfulness and bewildering *naïveté* of look, speech, and gesture, that carried away the gravest. No sooner had he begun to speak, than it became apparent that Mahomet himself never felt more assured of his own mission than he. People might scoff and sneer and turn away. As long as he could speak and men would listen, he should utter the convictions which guided his life—convictions as important to the rest of the world as to himself. He spoke as he felt, and he felt called upon to preach a new faith and a new doctrine; in other words, he stood up as the apostle of humanity.

CHAPTER XIX.—MONSIEUR SYLVESTRE'S SERMON ON THE MILLENNIUM.

FRIENDS and fellow-believers in a golden age, since there is surely no one here who does not look back to an Eden lost for ever to the children of sin, or forward to a Paradise promised to the children of grace. But for such memories and hopes as these, humanity might well have fainted and fallen under the burden imposed upon it through all ages. Had the forefathers of historic races left behind them no traditional reign of joy and innocence, no mythic land whose gardens grew unfading flowers, whose crystal rivers ran over sands of gold—were they bound to no bright shores, which to touch they believed was to become immortal, and to be enrolled among the beautiful children of God for all time—the common life of everyday must indeed have been insupportable. Groping by the light of history through the dark regions of the past, what appalling sights meet us on every side! We shudder, we shrink back, we shut our eyes, and would fain forget that such things have been, were we not too often reminded of them by what is taking place at the present time. Life is certainly a little happier, a little more humanized, a little more rational than in former times; but not so happy, not so humanized, not so rational, that we can afford to lose for a moment those vague dreams of a perfected

existence hereafter. As the thought of Sunday, and the fields and the daisies, keeps alive hope in the heart of the miserable town child condemned to painful toil throughout the week, so does oppressed mankind cherish visions of untasted blisses that are to last for ever, and unseen regions to whose loveliness no home-returning traveller has borne testimony. And neither the sceptic nor the materialist can marvel at the tenacity with which the unhappier portion of their fellows cling to what they themselves consider chimeras wilder than fabled story of primeval Greece or legend that has floated down from the land of lotus-eaters. The human heart inclines naturally to joy as flowers to the sun. Every one would choose to be happy. None would willingly wear rags, go hungry, carry to their grave the degradation of poverty and the desolation of hatred. Yet, owing to the selfishness of the smaller portion of society and the slavishness of the larger, the happy, in other words, the good, the enlightened, are few, the ragged, the starving, the degraded, and the desolate are many. With the strangest inconsistency, the more fortunate, people the imagined realms of felicity with those they hold aloof from here, and think to live in perpetual friendship with those they have victimized, despoiled, and despised. That divine equality which ought to form the basis of every Utopia, whether pagan or Christian, is so ignored in practice, that we cannot move a step without being reminded of the aristocratic usurpation of man over man. Even in this free and happy England the spirit of caste informs the very breath and life of the nation. I look around and see man toiling for his brother as a slave for his master by right of purchase. Here we have Dives, clad in purple and fine linen, splendid to look on, a king of the earth; there we have Lazarus, starving at his gate, covered with sores, loathsome even to the pitiful. However consoling these spiritual glimpses into future worlds may have been, they have not fed the hungry, clothed the naked, protected the weak; and till the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the weak are protected, the despairing multitude may well seek refuge from present evils in the contemplation of joys to come. But I am not here to-night to cavil at those sweet and salutary creeds, which, although they have not worked the practical reformation of humanity, have at least soothed it under suffering, fortified it under temptation, elevated it on the verge of dissolution. As well might we blame the lily that it does not

nourish us, the rainbow that it does not clothe us, the nightingale that it does not toll for us, as blame religion that it has not wholly reformed as well as ineffably consoled the world. Least of all should I, the humblest of the humble among you, stand forth to reproach the faith that has elevated erring men and weak women into prophets, saints, martyrs, of every race and in every age.

It is of prophets, indeed, and of saints and of martyrs, that I would speak to you to-night; but of those who were moved to dreams and to deeds, less by a faith in the perfection of future worlds and in the perfectibility of man become immortal, than by a faith in the perfection of the actual world in which we move, and in the perfectibility of man as he is, namely, a creature mental and material. These dreamers said to themselves, Is not the nature of the universe friendly? Is not this actual existence pleasant? Is not man by nature strong and noble? Is not woman by instinct good and pure? Let us strive with all our might to transform the present into a Paradise, the world into a heavenly kingdom, and thus the better prepare ourselves for the immortality in which we are taught to believe. And they went about the world wearing 'an aspect as if they pitied men,' spending their strength and their substance in the good cause of universal well-being, sowing words of wisdom, imperishable as the growth of fresh flowers, whose seedlings are borne eastward and westward by myriads of swift-winged birds.

And what did they find wherever they went? What do their disciples find now? Society divided into two portions, a lesser and a larger; the first composed of men and women, cared for, body and mind, enabled so to care for their children, sleeping softly, sheltered from the heat, protected against the cold, able to enjoy all that the abundance of nature and the cunning of man have produced for the gratification of the intellect and the senses, love and beauty, art and learning, the treasures of all time and the loveliness of all lands; the larger portion composed of men and women whose existence is one of unrelenting toil, of hunger and thirst, of cold and nakedness, of deprivation and despair, from the cradle to the grave. What matters it to them that the summer is come, that the fields are gay with millions of wild flowers, that the poets go into the woods and sing, that the pulsations of the happy earth beat throughout the long bright day? What matters it to them that the divine Galileo descried

the stately rhythm of the spheres, that Shakespeare created a happy world, that Beethoven set the solemn passions and aspirations of humanity to such music as must rejoice the angels listening on the golden stairs of heaven? Suffering has blinded, deafened, brutalized those men we call brothers, those women whom we call sisters. The world grows richer, wiser, lovelier; wonderful tidings are carried across distant seas; science works miracles of which the ancients never dreamed. Yet the lot of the greatest number of human beings remains unchanged! Ignorant, enslaved, joyless, dwarfed in body and mind, is it great wonder that to such, life passes unregretted and death comes as a friend?

But the teachers of whom I have spoken, the believers in a golden age to come, mind you, upon earth, did not regard these evils as God's decrees or as nature's laws, but as man's perversities; and their efforts to redress them are among the noblest on historic record. Their names may not shine emblazoned in purple and gold in the archives of fame, but their thoughts will live in the minds of men for ever. You have before you in my own person the humblest disciple of one of these reformers. Like them, I have been slandered, scoffed at, hunted down, punished with fine, with imprisonment, with exile. And why? Because I refused to acquiesce in tyranny, because I held back from robbing the poor, because I stood up for liberty and the rights of the people. There is not one of you who would not weep to hear my story, had I the time to tell it now. That I have outlived the malice of tyrants, and borne the wrath of my oppressors without losing heart, is the strongest proof I can give you of my faith in my fellow-men and in the future of the world.

When I speak to you of the social reformers who have been of every age—of Plato, in whose ideal Republic the intellectual teachers of the day may still drink from copious springs of wisdom; of Sir Thomas More, whose Utopia teems with golden maxims; of the monk Campanella, who expiated his dazzling vision of a perfect state, at the stake; and, in later times, of Robert Owen in England, and of Charles Fourier in France—is it possible that my words may sound strange as I spoken in an unknown tongue? It may well be so. These glorious names, shining out like stars, may have been pointed out to you by no pioneer in the luminous regions of truth; but a day is coming, nay, the day of it is already here, when the world shall recognise her true sovereigns, her un-

prophets, her veritable saviours, and swear allegiance to them on bended knee. Then shall be shattered into a thousand pieces the images of false gods and heroes, the spoliators of the people, the devastators of the earth, the enemies of peace, of brotherly love, and of progress, the upholders of tyranny, of bloodshed, of eternal warfare between nation and nation. O golden crowns that have hitherto bestowed fictitious majesty on the brows of despots! O purple robes that have hidden the cloven foot! O mighty sceptres swayed by blood-stained hands! Well may the angels in heaven smile and the pure-hearted on earth rejoice at the dawn of a happy age and a regenerated humanity. When that time comes—and vainly may the armed forces of all the world strive to turn back the tide of progress—we shall weep for those who have lived before us in oppression, in slavery, and in despair!

CHAPTER XX.—MONSIEUR SYLVESTRE'S SERMON ON THE MILLENNIUM (*continued*).

AND now let me try to answer the question that I see written on a hundred faces, namely, what claims have the Socialist leaders and especially Fourier upon the gratitude of the world? What claims? They are so numerous that I know not where to begin. I am, moreover, aware that everything I say in their favour to-day will be disputed or contradicted to-morrow. The very name of Socialism recalls, I doubt not, follies and iniquities past numbering to you—men living like Solomon, each with a hundred wives, and as many more as he could afford to provide for—having no religion, no laws, and so on. Well, I happened to light upon a curious old book the other day which will save me a good many explanations, and serve as a short cut to a high road. This book, purporting to be an 'Illustration of Prophecy,' after having given many expositions of Scripture and prophecies of the overthrow of the pope, the downfall of civil despotism, and the consequent bettering of the state of the world, ends by a picture of the Millennium on earth, to which various scriptural predictions are supposed to point. The author ingeniously turns to account, not only the Apocalypse, but the books of Isaiah and Daniel, in support of this theory, which, I need hardly say, goes against most of the commentaries familiar to us. According to him, the millenary period is not to follow the destruction of the world by fire, but the reconstruction of society according to the principles of justice and rationalism, and will

overtake us whilst the familiar sun shines overhead, the sea, as of old, beats on our shores, the seasons come and go like friends of happy childhood. Christ will not descend from his sublime throne to reign for a thousand years, the old Christian martyrs will not rise again, the Jews will not rebuild Jerusalem; but knowledge will spread, equality will be acknowledged, excessive poverty and intemperate labour will disappear from the face of the earth, bad government and false religion will be overthrown, and mankind will mutually labour for each other's benefit and to supply each other's wants. No longer, says the author, will a decided majority, as is now the case in almost all the civilised countries of the globe, lead a life of indigence and of toil, whilst a few individuals, in every district, riot in luxury and in splendour, and with systematic prodigality consume upon themselves and their families the labours of hundreds and thousands.

Again, he says:—Of the industrious part of mankind, at present only a small part receive an adequate and reasonable compensation for their labours. In rewarding the exertions of ingenuity and diligence, no laws of proportion are observed, no rules of equity are attended to. In this respect society will assume a new aspect. Furthermore, he says:—With bad government and false religion, not only will war, discord, and pestilence, in a great measure, be banished from the world, but also those other evils which naturally flow from the same sources, sloth and ignorance, hypocrisy and persecution, superstition and infidelity, excessive poverty and intemperate labour. Here you have the Millennium of Socialism, which may be summed up in three words, equality, well-being, fraternal love. Truth works in marvellous ways, or it would be strange indeed to find the very pith and essence of Socialist doctrine anticipated in an obscure volume of commentaries on Scripture. Have we not in these passages the germs of political and social equality of women, universal enlightenment, universal well-being, universal peace? Will any rational person refuse to believe that it is well that men should work together as brothers, having a common bond and a common interest, that the toilers by sea and by land should receive some share of the fruits of their labours, that the humblest human being should have an adequate development of his faculties, that pauperism should no longer deface the world like a leprosy, that the

nightmare of war should cease to affright humanity?

The sum-total of our doctrine amounts to this:—we believe in the possibility of universal well-being; we look to universal well-being as the regenerator of the world. I know well enough what will be urged against such a doctrine by those who inculcate poverty as a Christian duty, and a submissive spirit as a jewel among Christian virtues. But let me recall to their minds a lesson from history. Who has not read an account of that grand army which the first Napoleon

led into the heart of Russia? Then was to be seen the spectacle of a hundred thousand men, animated with a common spirit and a common pride, love of France, and passion for glory. Personal ambition was called into play. The common soldier knew that he might become corporal, non-commissioned officer, officer; the officer knew that he might attain to the grade of general, the general, in his turn, might become a field-marshal, the field-marshal, a king; for Napoleon gave away thrones as well as orders and staffs. Harmony, friendliness, and order



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reigned supreme so long as the French eagle was victorious. But when fortune forsook them, what happened? I need hardly recall the return from Moscow. Starving, in rags, exposed to the horrors of a northern winter, fearful was the deterioration that overcame those brave men. The most appalling egotism took possession of them as a demon. Here, a comrade was murdered for the sake of his seat by the fire; there, for a handful of dried peas! I could make your hair stand on an end, 'like quills upon the fretful porcupine,' were I to repeat the appalling

stories I have myself heard old soldiers tell of this campaign. But no sooner were food, fire, clothes, and shelter to be had, than things became as before. Men behaved to each other as men, and not as wild beasts. Is not the moral of such a lesson plain enough to be read by all who run?—the harmonious development of society must be based upon a fair distribution of material good. 'Crucify him, crucify him, base materialist and gross demoraliser that he is!' I hear many well-disposed and Christian-minded brothers and sisters say. What have we to do with you?

O deifier of the flesh! O despiser of the soul! Hear me a little longer. Have we not just seen that body and soul cannot be sundered, but are linked together for good or for evil, either as in the words of your poet, 'like perfect music wed to noble words,' or as two galley-slaves, only to torment and revile each other. We see every day that poverty and bodily degradation, such as hunger, thirst, and nakedness, instead of elevating humanity, brutalize it, whilst the man of healthy mind, and healthy frame, the inheritor of material well-being, culture, and disciplined moral force, has a comparatively ideal existence. Are the gulfs of separation between civilised man and man, so called, wider than between savage man and beast? I know not. Thus much I know, that the condition of the unfortunate of his fellow-creatures drives the humane thinker to weep agonized tears, and the world takes no heed.

The master whose humble disciple I am, and whose words of wisdom I would fain cull for you to-night, wept many such tears. He would not believe—can any reflecting being believe?—that the evils of society are inevitable. He said to himself that the sentiments of human fellowship, of sympathy, of brotherly love, are innate in the mind of all men, and to society alone imputed their suppression. He devoted his whole life to the solution of one great problem, namely, the regeneration of society by moral and material rather than by spiritual means, seeing that hitherto spiritual means had failed to extinguish misery, vice, and degradation from the face of the earth. And slowly and serenely there dawned upon the mind of this great man a vision of life so excellent and of a world so happy, that the golden age of the poet and the Utopia of the philosopher were for ever cast into the shade. Fourier—I bow in spirit before thy beloved and revered name—was no mere political economist, coldly weighing out human units in one scale and national wealth and national interest in the other; no mere enthusiast, spreading sail to any chance breeze of fancy; no theorist, handling abstractions as if things of flesh and blood; one of Nature's best beloved children, she took him into her counsels, and laid to his ear the resounding shell of the universe. Like the Egeria of Roman story, she discoursed to him in secret groves of things sacred and human, informing him with wisdom and devotion. He emerged from those solemn communions, not the mere philanthropic thinker he went in, but

a prophet, a teacher, a reformer, destined to live for ever in the memories of men.

How can I give any idea of these grand schemes, which to conceive was to read the riddle of the moral universe, to discover the sublime analogies existing between the world of nature and the world of man, to hear and comprehend the mighty harmonies of the social and stellar spheres? Alas! I know not. I can only throw at your feet the golden sheaves I have reaped in these fields, and say, Help yourselves without stint or spare. Do you weep, O priests, for the sufferings of your flocks that are past heavenly consolation? Do you feel ashamed, O my brothers, for the shame you bring upon women? Do you tremble, O my sisters, at the spectacle of little children toiling like bondsmen in a country that owns no slaves? Do you groan, O statesmen, at the plague of pauperism that scourges our capitals? Do you bewail, O philanthropists, the dreary lot of the greater number of human beings? Then take counsel of the Socialists, for they are like the angels that come with healing on their wings.

In the present state of society, a few fare sumptuously, and sleep softly on downy pillows, dreaming away the noontide in fragrant gardens, surrounded by beautiful things from childhood upwards, deprived of no gratification ordained by bountiful Nature to rejoice the heart of men, loving life because of its pleasantness. But Fourier said, 'Heaven has not so willed it. Let all fare sumptuously and lie soft. Let all smell fragrant flowers and be surrounded by beautiful things. Let all have their fill of the good gifts of our mother earth. Let all love life because of its pleasantness. Why should some be instructed and others go ignorant?—some possess hundreds of thousands and others need the penny for their daily bread? Why should some be surfeited with pleasure, and others live from year to year without a day of gratification?' 'Enslave people,' he reasoned; 'and they will prey upon their fellows, deprive them of fresh air and instruction, and they will commit brutal actions, divide society into fortunate and miserable, rich and poor, enlightened and ignorant; and men will hate each other with a devilish hate.'

When society is founded on a proper basis poverty will have disappeared, and, as a natural consequence, theft and envy, brutality and despair; so also spoliation and murder, lusts and riot must cease to exist as soon as the temptation to such sins is banished. Give all men and women a chance of rising to the

proper dignity of human beings, and they would unlearn the miserable degradation and refined selfishness now fostered by the unjust distribution of moral as well as material good. The creed of Fourierism, contrary to the creeds that have gone before, consists in self-development rather than in self-denial, in self-government rather than in self-negation, in fulfilment rather than in repression, in plenary acceptance rather than in desperate abstinence. We believe that the Divine Creator filled the brimming cornucopœia of the universe, not for the satisfaction and enjoyment of a few, but for the satisfaction and enjoyment of all. Is not an acquiescence in the present condition of things to accuse our great Parent of having neglected ones among his children?—as if God did not love all mankind alike! Fourier had a happier faith, a sublimer confidence, and refused to accuse the Divinity of partiality held hateful by mortal men.

Ah! what dreams were his as he sat apart from men, taking counsel of God, of nature, and of man! Can I with my imperfect speech translate into words those transcendent visions, which to pourtray fitly should be traced by golden pencils of angels on the shining floor of heaven?

He saw, as he sat thus solitary in his high communings, the face of this lovely familiar world, which all but the unhappiest hold dear as a nursing mother, greatly changed, so changed that, but for his fleshly garments, he must have believed himself in the Christian's Paradise. The bloody panoplies of war had disappeared alike from the bright morning land and the pale north; no glittering armies devastated the abundant fields, no stalwart hosts in the glory of youth fell like corn beneath the scythe of the enemy. The mothers of the poor no longer brought forth their man-child with bitterness because of the soldier's death that might overtake him in his prime, or their woman-child with despair, because of the shame that might fall upon her beauty. He saw horrid shapes, fleeing affrighted from a place that knew them no more; foremost of these was Lust, and, tramping on its heels, bloated Luxury and hollow-cheeked Destitution and ghastly Suicide. They fled with face averted and hot, cowardly haste, like murderers hurrying from the scene of bloodshed, wailing hideously for the kingdom from which they were dethroned for ever; for the great

cities of the world, those Babel-like strongholds of filth, and crime, and poverty, which had harboured all these, were gone, and in their place stood fair and stately capitol, each a dozen palaces in one, where men and women lived together in the harmony engendered of voluntary labour and plenary enjoyment. The loom and the ploughshare were plied as busily as ever, but in joy and not in weariness, since those who wove the glowing tapestries, and reaped the ripe, red corn, shared the firstfruits of their toil. It was wonderful to see a look of calm and happy expectation on every face. Men had gained in strength and stature, women in grace and loveliness; and the accustomed spectacle of isolation on the one hand, and profligacy on the other, was wholly wanting. And why? Because men were at length aroused to see their self-indulgence and self-degradation in the proper light, and were led to prefer pure and happy love to unhallowed pleasure. That awful figure, the most awful of civilisation, namely, the pariah woman, had disappeared. Ah! how good was it to see a world without the sin I dare not name! How good to see with what joy the dawn was greeted! with what peace the sun went down! when each man and each woman had a fair share of the bounties of earth and heaven,—a little love, a little freedom, a little joy! when the majestic temples of art, science, and philosophy were thrown open, that all might enter in and worship! when the clear-throated trumpet and the triumphant clarion no longer in the name of glory led hosts against hosts in common massacre, but grand industrial armies to unimagined victories! Then, indeed, the habitations of the universe resounded, like a many-voiced choir, with sweet melody. Man was joyful, and in his joy called music to minister to him; and he saw, not only in music, but in other gratifications alike of the senses and the intellect, the surest road to a life renewed to beautiful completeness. O Nature! cried the denizen of the regenerated earth, gratefully as a child addressing his mother, thou hast filled for me a cornucopœia running over with corn, oil, and wine. Shall I draw back churlishly, as a poor relation from a grudging host? Shall I not rather accept abundantly, as thou hast offered abundantly, feeling that the good and happy life is the best offering man can lay upon the altar of his God?

PART V.

CHAPTER XXI.—LAYING THE FOUNDATION.



HOW much or how little the good people of St. Beowulf's understood of Monsieur Sylvestre's discourse, which he had forthwith printed for gratuitous distribution, it would be hard to say; what they thought of it, harder still.

That he possessed the gift of speech none could deny, for he had made them smile, weep, go into ecstasy, or look aghast, as he willed. The poor wished they could hear him preach every Sunday, the clerical ladies courted his fine voice for their choirs. But the chief consequence of his discourse was the curiosity thereby excited. Every one wondered who he was, why he had come there, and what he wanted to do. He talked of disseminating ideas. What were ideas? Had he invented a new plough or a sowing machine, and proposed to test its powers before the eyes of possible buyers, the matter would have been easy to understand. But as far as they could make out, he had done nothing of the kind, and only wanted to talk and be listened to. Was he a second Tom Paine in disguise, come to corrupt the minds of the young with atheistical doctrines, or an apostle of Mormonism come to preach plurality of wives, a Fenian plotting against the government, or a Red Republican contriving the ruin of the French Empire? These surmises floated hazily in the minds of those who had heard of such things as atheists, Mormons, Fenians, and other conspirators, but at present they were content to let their suspicions take the form of mild inquisitiveness. He amused them, and how good and pleasant it is to be amused! Within living memory no such social phenomenon had appeared.

And his deeds were as mysterious as his words. The first to rise in the morning, he was the last to relinquish work at night, interspersing his hours of labour with pianoforte-playing, painting in water-colours, or writing essays. He undertook the roughest work, and made his labourers take two hours out of the middle of the day for what he called intellectual advancement,—alas! most often devoted to drowse and beer. He turned half an acre of corn-land into a garden of standard roses, so that young men and maidens should have garlands during the following summer. He planted a whole field with saplings of the Australian *Eucalyptus globulus*, which he predicted would become a superb forest in the course of twenty years. He sent to Spain for sheep, to Algeria for silk-worms, to the farthest quarters of the world for seeds and roots, intending to turn his farm into a *jardin d'acclimatization*. He planted his banks with strawberries, and employed children to gather thistle-down for pillows. People saw plain enough that he was playing fast and loose with somebody's money, and they naturally said it was with Ingaretha's money.

The Academy, for so the newly-opened hall of arts and sciences was named, fell under his entire administration, and as far as amusement went, the people had no right to complain. Besides fortnightly readings and lectures on a variety of subjects, he organized concerts and dances. There is a good deal of music in our country people, if only brought out, and after the first awkwardness wore off, the invitations were responded to with alacrity, partly because the villagers thought it a fine thing for their children to learn dancing, partly because they were anxious not to affront Ingaretha's friends.

Maddio played the violin, Euphrosyne the piano. Monsieur Sylvestre initiated young and old into the mysteries of the quadrille and country dance. Why should not the poor be fêted as well as the rich, he asked, since in temperate gratification of the senses lies the only road to an adequate development of character? Accordingly, the hall was decked with banners and evergreens, guests were encouraged to come in their Sunday clothes, and were plied with cakes and lemonade by their three hosts. Every one knows that English rustics are far from possessing the dignity and good-humour of the

French, German, and Italian peasantry, partly because their life is much more monotonous and wholly pleasureless, and partly because they are on different terms with their superiors. Had the ladies and gentlemen of St. Beowulf's mixed with them on the same free and easy terms, most likely such an intercourse would have ended in downright boorishness on the one side and disgust on the other. But in this case no such inconvenience arose. In the first place, Monsieur and Madame Sylvestre and Maddio all three possessed that exquisite simplicity of manners which disarms coarseness, and that ineffable tact which knows how to deal with every quality of character except knavery. Their past acquaintance with poverty, moreover, never for an instant concealed, touched the hearts of their rough acquaintances. And then they were ever ready to help any one in need or distress, whether Churchman or Dissenter mattered little, which afforded a new reading of the texts about charity. If a little boy was to be breeched, none in the village could cut out a pair of trousers so well as Madam, thus had Madame Sylvestre come to be called. If a labourer fell on to a pitchfork, she could bind up his wound like a surgeon. As to Maddio, he knew everything, people said, from catching a mole to stuffing a peacock, or, what seemed more difficult still, making gripe balls for horses. He was an excellent herbalist, and they soon had recourse to his homely specifics with as much faith and alacrity as if he had been a quack. Perhaps his odd appearance reminded them of the Wise Man of whom their fathers had bequeathed such strange tales, for seventy years ago few towns were without some mysterious person, wizard, doctor, astrologer, and fortune-teller in one, to whom people went if a cow fell ill, if they wanted to know when rain was expected, or if a gipsy had stolen a silver spoon. But the activity of the little family at Pilgrim's Hatch did not end here. Before the dreary days of winter fairly set in, a newspaper issued fortnightly from the press of the Liberal St. Beowulf's newspaper. It was called "The Germ of Truth," and consisted of two small sheets, fairly printed. First came a leader, which was, properly speaking, a short sermon on the divine right of equality, the attraction of labour, the benefits of association, or some other Socialist topic treated with no little unction and picturesqueness; then followed the application of these principles in the following manifesto:—"To material bankrupts, moral millionaires, friends of Socialism

and followers of the divine Fourier. We call upon you to aid us in organizing a Phalanstery, that is to say, an agricultural community based upon the principles of the divine Fourier. It is not money we want, nor land, nor any fruits of the earth, all these are abundantly supplied us by the large generosity, we might rather say exquisite justice, of those friends who share our views and understand to the full the meaning of that pregnant word, Solidarity. But we want men, women, and children who will strive with us to establish the glorification of labour, and to bring about the regeneration of society by means of harmonious attraction. Come to us, labour with us, enjoy with us, O choice souls who have drunk from the fountains of our great master's wisdom, and we will begin the joyful task of reforming the world." A short advertisement follows to this effect:—"N.B. —The Phalanstery in course of organization is to be heard of through the printer of this journal, where are to be had back numbers of 'The Germ of Truth,' price one halfpenny." The remaining space was filled with scraps of poetry, mottoes, notices of foreign societies, &c.

This little paper was distributed largely among the good people of the village, though, as may easily be imagined, not a word of its purport was understood. Copies were dispatched to London, Paris, Alsace, and Algeria. Monsieur Sylvestre rubbed his hands with glee when the printers announced that a fresh edition was necessary.

"Ah, we shall soon recall the happy days of old," he would say, "the seed is falling on good soil. In a week, nay, in a day, we may find our fondest dreams brought to pass, and our phalanstery a thing of reality."

"Meantime the printing of so many tracts is sadly expensive," Euphrosyne said sighing. "If people would only pay their subscriptions!"

"To make a traffic of the truth is a prostitution," he answered with indignation. "I would rather starve than earn a penny by selling my ideas."

"Alas! one must sell something in order to live."

"Well, let us sell our corn."

"But the wheat now being put into the ground will not be ripe till August, and the barley is not to be sown till the spring. We have three quarters of a year before us."

"We must be economical then, my angel, that is the easiest solution of the problem."

Euphrosyne said no more, but straightway racked her brains to devise some

means of saving money. The Sphinx had never a harder task. Monsieur Sylvestre's pet extravagance represented a good round sum yearly, and could she have persuaded him to leave off printing pamphlets, to buy no more costly seeds or new farming implements, to be reasonable in fact, the prospects of nine months without corn to sell would not have seemed appalling. She knew too well, poor woman, that to reason with him on such points was to pour water through a sieve.

Already the full blossomed prosperity that had burst upon them like the first day of roses in summer, was tarnished. Gay as a butterfly, he disported himself among the flowers; sad as Eve, she trembled at every shadow lest it might portend the presence of the expelling angel.

CHAPTER XXII.—RENE'S LETTER.

AND what of René? As week after week slipped by, and still he gave no sign, Ingaretha's cheeks lost something of their roundness, and her smile something of its joy. Monsieur Sylvestre could not be induced to share her anxiety.

"Wait a little, sweet child," he said, "and you will see that our René deports himself like a hero."

"Ah!" Maddio would rejoin, rubbing his hands gleefully, "we shall hear of him creating an Eden in the Far West, perhaps. Our René has so much courage."

At length the mysterious silence was broken by a little letter, evidently written in great haste and perturbation:—

"Sweetest lady and friend," he wrote to Ingaretha from Paris, "I never meant to have troubled you any more as long as I lived; but now you will be seeing my name in the newspapers soon, and that would disconcert you. You know what a war I have waged with my pen, ever since I was a boy, against oppression and prejudice. I have never been idle, God knows; and whatever I did was done in the hope of more useful achievements by-and-by. To project and carry on a newspaper seems a little thing; but how much it may mean in such days as these, when written words are winged, omnipotent, omnipresent! Has not the right of speaking out saved your England, and shall it not save our France! Alas! not yet. Do you understand what I mean, when I say that I am a member of the Association Internationale des Travailleurs? That is to say, that I am a volunteer in what will soon be the largest army the world has ever seen,

but an army of peaceful men of all nations and not of soldiers, whose watchword is Progress instead of Glory—that noble legend, as some one has said, over which is scrawled in bloody palimpsest the parody of tyrants. What our society is I cannot stop to tell you now, ask *le père Sylvestre* or Maddio—I can only say that it is composed of the staunchest friends of peace and liberty, two names that are but words here in our beautiful France where tyranny and selfishness incarnate, wrapped in purple, sit on the necks of the people. Of course, if the worm turns it is crushed or quelled. I have done nothing to make you blush for your friend. My guilt and that of my friends lies only in daring to belong to a peaceful progressive society at all; and we are to be tried forthwith. You will see the result in the papers, or if not, have only to apply to our secretary in London. Whether things turn out well or ill for me, does not much matter. I commend you to your brothers and sisters, the angels, and all good people. Your devoted servitor, RENE."

Ingaretha was not a woman to sit by when her friends were in trouble, and an hour later she was on her way to London, accompanied by Madame Sylvestre. There seemed only one way of helping René, namely, by means of advocates' fees. Accordingly, she had supplied herself with a good round sum in Bank of England notes, and a letter of introduction to the London secretary of the Société Internationale des Travailleurs. As luck would have it, there was a sitting of the council at the society's chambers in High Holborn that very night; but the working men's parliament cannot open proceedings whilst the working men are at work, so they had to get through the weary hours of waiting as best they might. Everything was wrapped in yellow fog, and what a dreary phantasmagoria is a London day in November! you walk through the lurid alleys, meeting livid spectres at every step, for surely these blue-iced, shivering ghosts are no men and women! Ingaretha and Madame Sylvestre, ill-fated like all women in quest of manly comforts, fared badly. Thankful enough that the time was come for going out, they left these blissful regions exactly at half-past seven, and at eight o'clock their cab stopped at a little shop in High Holborn. The shutters were closed, and the side door also. It was opened by a young German mechanic, dishevelled, and in working clothes. His look of surprise vanished on hearing their errand, though he held the

door open gingerly, evidently in doubt as to the possibility of admitting them.

"The council is sitting, and I am not sure whether ladies are allowed to be present, but I will ask the secretary," he said, and ran up-stairs, taking Ingaretha's credentials, namely, Monsieur Sylvestre's letter, with him.

A parley of some minutes followed, the two ladies waiting in no little suspense. At length the messenger returned, and with a nod of affirmation conducted them up the dark and narrow staircase into the council-chamber of the Association Internationale des Travailleurs.

The room was small and dingy, but supplied with abundance of light. Round the table sat ten or a dozen men, most of them dressed like ordinary workmen when the day's work is done—all looking more or less wearied, a few terribly pale, some thoughtful and serious, others animated and eager. The chief European nationalities were here represented—German, French, Spanish, Italian, English—and better types, intellectually speaking, could hardly be found anywhere. Self-government, concentration, purpose, were written on every brow; of energy there was ample sign, of restlessness none. Much as one face might differ from the rest in other respects, they were alike in this, that all wore an expression of oneness with self and the world. The general physique was inferior. In spite of fair stature and manly beard, they lacked that look of vigour and health indicated by the broad chest, the ruddy skin, the bright eye.

On the entrance of the strangers, all rose from their seats and bowed. The secretary advanced, gave Ingaretha his hand, and led her into a corner, saying in a low voice that her business should be attended to presently. Then the work of the evening was resumed; the quiet dignity and politeness with which they had been received putting Ingaretha and Madame Sylvestre as much at their ease as was to be expected under such circumstances.

One by one, a member stood up and read a report, and laid a proposition before the council. The proceedings were occasionally interrupted by the tinkling of the street bell and the admittance of a tardy member; but all was done in the quietest manner possible. Citizen after citizen—thus each speaker was called—said what he had to say, and made way for his neighbour.

At last the matter of the impending trials in Paris was brought forward, and Ingaretha's friend, Citizen Berger, rose to address

the meeting. He had received, he said, a communication concerning Citizen René Rubelle, which he should presently disclose. In the meantime, what was the attitude that the association should assume at such a crisis? They were accused of being a secret society, whereas no society could be called secret which embraced the great bulk of all nations, namely, the working-men. They were accused of having plotted in the dark against the Empire, whilst the revolution they proposed to bring about was no conspiracy against tyrants in particular, but social despotism in general, and could only be accomplished in the broad daylight of public opinion. Surely now or never was the time to declare and define, without compromise, the objects of the association, and to lay before the world a straightforward programme of the ends they had in view. An animated discussion followed, at the end of which the secretary and the president interchanged a few hurried words of explanation. Then Ingaretha was requested to make known her wishes, and way was made for her at the table. But at this juncture courage forsook her; she turned first red, then pale, stammered out an incoherent apology, and looked on the point of bursting into tears, had not Euphrosyne come to her aid. "Citizens," she said, speaking with her usual quiet pathos, "this lady is a good friend of my husband, Jean Charles Sylvestre, whose name will be known to some of you, and of our fellow in misfortune, Citizen René Rubelle. She has hastened to London to see if she can be of use to him at this crisis—that is to say, to offer money for the defrayal of his legal expenses. I trust, citizens, that you will accept this offer, made as it is in all sincerity and affection."

She sat down, and again a lively discussion took place. Not unnaturally, a few shy glances were directed towards Ingaretha, that lovely golden-haired lady who had come hither on René's account. A presence so enchanting had never before graced the gloomy little council-chamber in High Holborn, and it touched the hearts of those toil-worn representatives of labour. They also felt a little natural pride in having gained over such a convert to their cause. What cause ever despised the advocacy of a young, rich, and beautiful woman?

Citizen Roser thanked Madame Sylvestre in the name of the assembly, and accepted the offer made to them by René's friend. Madame Sylvestre tendered the money, and the two ladies were then permitted to retire.

CHAPTER XXIII.—A BETROTHAL.

A DREARY interval of suspense followed, Ingaretha and her friends watching the Paris trials with alternate hope and fear. What those trials were like may be easily conceived by those who have been in the habit of reading the various Socialist newspapers during the last few years. The working men's advocates knew how to make the best of a good cause, but the fiat of the French Jupiter had gone forth against liberty for once and for all, and their words were vain as children's arrows hitting a granite wall. There was matter both for laughter and tears in the proceedings.

And what in truth was this International Association of Working Men of which the world began to be afraid? A dark conspiracy against peace and order? A secret society sworn to overthrow principalities and powers? A league whose watchword was death and destruction? Nay, rather a sober and solemn Guild, after the fashion of mediæval craftsmen, pledged not to destroy but to build up, not to unloose but to bind together—a great industrial army arrayed against war and tyranny and ignorance, whose progress has been undaunted in the teeth of obstacles that might well appal the bravest. Have not the workmen had to fight for every inch of ground over and over again, as the history of trades' unions amply testifies? And what does such a victory mean? No more nor less than a modest share of the good things God doubtless intended for all his creatures, a little fresh air, a little rest from toil, a little ease, a little instruction. Is this the sort of conquest to make the rich and mighty tremble? And if they tremble at this, what will they say to the changes that are surely coming upon us—the signs of which those who run may read?

Thus much must be accorded to the members of the International Working Men's Association: that when, quite lately, France saw itself gradually led to its ruin, the voice of its members, and theirs only, was raised against the crime and cunning of rulers. "Are we mad," said they, "that this man, this enemy of free thought and free speech, the friend and patron of traitors, should do with us as he wills for the sake of a hateful dynasty? Or, if we are not mad, by what foul and fatal sorcery are we bewitched? In God's name, let us bestir ourselves, and shake off the vile enchantment while there is yet time." But none took heed, and the end was—what? All the world trembled in pity and sorrow at

the miseries that overwhelmed France because she had confided her destiny to a Bonaparte.

Further, let us clear ourselves of some prejudices that have crept, we hardly know how, into the conceptions of even the just and the thoughtful concerning this vast league of working men. *Nous autres*, we revellers in the best of the good things provided by nature and man's ingenuity, are apt to impute the very kind of faults to the working classes to which we are most given ourselves, and with much less temptation. We say, "Why encourage the selfishness of these people, the aping after good clothes, education, the comforts and enjoyments possessed by their so-called betters? Better preach to them the good old thrice-blessed doctrine of humility, and show them that enjoyment and self-development, whether social, intellectual, or moral, are only for the few, not for the many, who were born to be brutish, heathenish—but content!" Is not this very kind of selfishness the prevailing fault of the better classes? "The vices among the poor sometimes astound us here," said one who knew them well; "but when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known, their virtues will astound us in far greater degree. Of this I am certain."

René had but said a few plain truths in a fervent manner, had uttered moreover a few political prophecies soon to come true, and a good cause was made for him by his advocates.

But nothing could shield him, and he was condemned to nine months' imprisonment and a fine of a hundred francs.

Nine months! Why not ninety years? thought Ingaretha in her indignation of youthful sorrow. She wept when none were by, and called upon the name of her lover, hiding her face under a veil of golden hair; she tore off her jewels; she put on a black dress. Why did the sun shine? Why did the wintry landscape wear a cheerful look? Why did the foolish little winter birds chirp gladly?

She felt as if she had grown old and wise within the last few weeks. What had been before important and conspicuous, was dwarfed into nothingness. As the primitive colours lose themselves in the ray of light, so all the passions of her soul were now merged into one supreme feeling for him. Was it pity, was it admiration, was it love? She knew not. She only said to herself how generous he was, and how unfortunate! how self-devoted and long-suffering! His Quixotic crusade against tyranny might seem a small and foolish thing to the unthinking world, but to her it approved itself differently. A

man can but have a noble ideal and live up to it.

She wondered that she had never helped him before with her love as well as her friendliness and compassion; and, sitting down, wrote this letter to him, which was sent off without the alteration of a word:—

"DEAREST FRIEND OF ALL,—I do not mean to cry any more if I can help it. I have looked at the almanack and counted the days that must come and go before you are out of prison, and I think you can be home on the 5th of August, my birthday. We shall save up all our joy till then, and when you are once here you must not go away again. Need I speak plainer? You will surely know what I mean. On my birthday I will make over to you something which is worth little unless so bestowed,—only a life, you used to say, you held dearer than anything else in the world. Do not be too sorry for me whilst you are in prison. We shall be quite happy when the harvest comes.—Your

"INGARETHA."

For a few days after the sending of that hastily-written, tear-blotted letter, Ingaretha was very meek and sad. Not even Euphrosyne knew what she had done, and she thought she would keep her secret till the corn was down and René was free again. Night and day she thought of that harvest. Would she be able to make him quite happy, as she had said? Would life become dearer to both?

About a week after her letter had gone, Carew found her in this tumultuous mood, red as a rose one moment, white as a lily the next, ready to smile, weep, be glad and sorry by turns. She scolded him for coming with a look, and made him welcome with a word. She begged him to sit down one instant, and declared that he had interrupted her the next. Would he play to her? Would he read aloud—there was a new volume of poems lying on the table? Would he help her with the arrangement of some pictures? All this was said in a breath. Lastly, would he go?

Then she burst into tears, and would have fled from him, but he caught hold of her hand and gained a hearing.

"This is sad news of our poor friend René," he said tenderly. "I should have called before to say how sorry I am, but I went to Paris on his behalf, and"—he added this with comic ruefulness—"finding that I could do him no good, I stayed there a little for my own pleasure."

"How good of you to try to help him!" she said, smiling through her tears.

"How unlike you to try to help anybody!" were more to the purpose. But I have a great friendliness for René, and I knew how you would suffer—" he stopped short, coloured, looked on the ground, and added after a pause, "You must not make yourself too unhappy about him. The best thing we can do is to devise some means of making his life more satisfactory when he is free again."

In her turn Ingaretha looked on the ground, her cheeks aflame like a field poppy.

"I have an idea," began Carew again.

"And so have I."

"Will you let me hear yours first? It is sure to be much the best."

For a long time she hesitated, and at last sadly and shyly blurted out the truth.

"I am going to marry him!" she said.

He could not doubt that she was in earnest, and he could but believe that she was in her senses. Blushing more crimson than the lady, he rose, sat down again, began to speak, broke off, took up his hat as if to go, then put it back on the floor, finally uttered the thought that was uppermost in his mind—

"It is impossible," he said, extremely agitated; "impossible, impossible!"

He walked first to one window, then to another, approached her, drew back, tried to speak, and failed.

"I have promised," she said, without lifting her eyes from the ground.

After that there seemed nothing more to be said.

"Is it so?" he asked, turning ashen-white. "Then I suppose I had better say nothing except good-bye?"

Yet he lingered.

"Don't blame me, don't be sorry for me!" Ingaretha cried, suddenly bursting into a passion of tears. "I know what I have done, and it could not be otherwise. When people speak ill of me, remember that."

He waited till she had dried her tears, and then held out his hand.

"I shall go abroad to-morrow, and we may not see each other again for a long time," he said sorrowfully. "You will not want the little play at Christmas now, any more than you will want the poet. Farewell, dear!"

And thus they parted.

True enough, the next day, Carew set off on a long journey through Spain, Italy, and Palestine, feeling dissatisfied and miserable enough. Why had fortune endowed him

with wealth? Why had nature made him a poet? Why had his progenitors bequeathed him the very qualities Ingaretha despised, denying him those in which her soul found pleasure—such as a passionate love of his fellow-creatures, a hatred of certain political principles, a thirst for social reform, also personal beauty, self-devotion, abandonment? For him, the only complete life seemed the æsthetic ideal of the Greeks of old, a marble palace of Art, holding a golden shrine dedicated to Beauty. He hated ugliness and restlessness in every shape, and avoided philanthropy and politics as if they had been pestilences.

But Ingaretha's heart and soul were in the things he abhorred. Like a sister of mercy, she would fain spend all the days of her life in charitable missions among the poor, the wretched, and the ignorant.

What was this great love for René but an expression of the profoundest compassion? He could not doubt it. René was a noble fellow, high-souled, eloquent, tender, beautiful; but he had been reared in a world quite different to her own. She was a daintily-bred lady, he a son of the people, a working man, associate of working men, a Red Republican and demagogue, a Socialist and would-be subverter of the class which she represented. Could she marry such a man? Again and again, he said to himself that it was impossible.

He forgot, in his burning impatience and mortification, some other qualities possessed by René which attract women beyond the sweet words or bewildering eyes of poets; beyond the splendid courage and bearing of soldiers; beyond the honeyed eloquence of religious enthusiasts. He had in abundance the kind of ambition that may truly be said to possess a man, that blazes out on a sudden, taking the passions of men and women by storm, intoxicating the sober, making an enthusiast of the calculator, leading, enthralling, binding with a spell at will. Such an ambition, allied to noble ends, turns the adventurer of yesterday into the hero of to-day, the hero of to-day into the martyr of the morrow. Ingaretha might well dream sometimes that her *prolégé*, comrade, lover, had a future. He was one of those would-be reformers who went about the world wearing "an aspect as if he pitied men," loving his fellow-creatures with an overmastering love, holding his own life as nothing compared to the duty of furthering what he held to be true and noble. Ingaretha knew René better than most women know their lovers. Unhappiness had broken

down the fictitious barriers of conventional etiquette, leaving them candid and unfettered. His loves, his hates, his victories and overthrows, his dreams and ideals, had been freely told her during the broken intercourse of the last ten years. And though he was a so-called son of the people, a social gipsy and a proletarian, he had never uttered a word that ill-beseemed such confidence.

Could Ingaretha choose but dream of him, weep for him, night and day?

CHAPTER XXIV.—EUPHROSYNÉ'S COUNSELL

WAS it to be expected that Ingaretha's secret should not come out in her daily intercourse with Euphrosyne? The two women loved each other dearly; and, underlying the warmth of every-day affection—rippling sunshine on the surface of deep pools—were hidden depths of sympathy and devotion as yet unsounded. Perhaps the most perfect of all friendships is that invested with a shade of mystery. To live calmly within reach of a kindred nature affords a sure and unfailing measure of gratification; but never to approach the friend of one's heart without a feeling of delicious expectancy, is to drink of the distilled essence of friendship and be filled. Thus it was with these two. Common things made Ingaretha weep now,—a snatch of wintry sunshine, the glories of a snow-storm among her fir-trees, the last new book of a beloved writer, an air of Weber, or a song of Schumann; for was not René deprived of all these? And when Euphrosyne would try to console her by picturing the happiness of release and the future that might still be in store for him, her cheeks would crimson with sudden joy, and again and again the words rose to her lips that she lacked courage to utter. Euphrosyne grew bewildered. Never had she seen her darling in such changeable mood; and, quite naturally, some inadvertent talk brought out the truth.

"Most men's affections are like straws tossed about by the wind," she said one day; "but René is as true as a woman. When he comes out of prison it will be better for him, on account of his love for you, to go to America."

"Never! never!" Ingaretha cried fiercely. "I am going to do with him as I will. He shall not go away from me."

"But he loves you, dear child."

"And do I not care for him?" She gathered her beautiful hair in her hands, adding, "All this I would give, every hair of it, as a ransom for René!"

"Ah, if he were only rich and happy, like Monsieur Carew!"

"Should I love him better?"—this also was said fiercely. "Would a million of money alter René at all?—the colour of his eyes, the shape of his mouth, the tone of his voice? Would it give him a new temper, sweeter than the old? a new nature, nobler than we have found his? Oh, don't talk, like all the rest of the world, about being rich and happy, dear Madame Sylvestre!"

"I but wished it, seeing how you two are drawn to each other," Euphrosyne answered.

Ingaretha rose from her seat, threw her arms round Euphrosyne's neck, and added in the same impetuous tone—

"If he is poor, am I not rich? That will do just as well. There, you have the whole truth. I am going to marry René. And why not?" she asked, anticipating Madame Sylvestre's unspoken objections. "Am I so rich in friends that I do not want him? Is my life so good that he could not make it better? He is a thousand times richer than I, after all."

And then she smiled on her friend lovingly



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and kissed her hand, as if fain to coax her into an assenting mood.

"He is richly endowed, Heaven knows," continued Euphrosyne; "and he adores you as only now and then a man adores a good woman. But is passion the best guide to be followed when the supreme crisis of life comes? I know not—I doubt——"

She was silent for awhile, overcome with mixed emotion, and then continued, Ingaretha kneeling at her feet, Ingaretha's fair head laid on her knees—

"How can I advise you in this, my dear?

Yet I was about your own age when the same decision was forced upon me, and I obeyed what my heart dictated without questioning. Was it well, or ill? God only knows."

And then she laid her hands about the girl's soft hair, and sighed again and again.

"You made some one happy who cared for you. That was well?" asked Ingaretha.

"Even the happiness of another person may be purchased too dear. I don't feel sure that what I did was wrong, dear Inga-

retha; but from time to time I have fearful misgivings. Love, I might almost say idolatry, of one human being took supreme possession of me at the time of which I speak, and has never loosed its hold. I mean my husband. I left all else, and followed him to the world's end, because I loved him. So will you leave all else, and follow René?"

"What do I leave?" asked Ingaretha impetuously. "I know well enough that people will hate me for what I do; but need that trouble me much? They will say that I am lost to all sense of family pride and womanly duty, and will talk of me under their breath as of one past compassion. Why should we mind that? René can help me to a better life than any of those I leave behind."

Madame Sylvestre sighed and said nothing.

"Is it not so?" Ingaretha continued, with persistence. "You see how isolated I am here—as far removed from the people of my own class as if I lived hundreds of miles away. If I pretended to be unlike myself, I should be thought well enough of; but I cannot do that. I determined, when first coming to this property, that I would lead an honest life at any cost—I mean, the life I held to be best, most satisfying, noblest. And what I have sought, I have only found with you—and with—him."

"Ah! you think too well of us. Our fulfilments fall sadly short of our ideals," Euphrosyne said sorrowfully, adding, "You do not know all."

"Would you have me take back my word, then? Do you think I am wrong in promising to marry him?" Ingaretha asked, looking up with dismay.

"As far as he is concerned, I have not a word to say. I have never known but one René, loyal, pure, true. I was thinking of ourselves then, my husband and I, who cause our friends so much unhappiness, however dearly we love them. Would that your lot were otherwise cast!"

"You speak as if you had done me some great harm," Ingaretha said; "whilst it is you who have saved me from my enemies."

"But you might have married Mr. Carew; and he, too, is good and loyal, and, I think, would make you very happy."

"Never!" Ingaretha said, crimsoning. "Are you, as well as the rest of the world, so blind where we two are concerned? Are we not always quarrelling? If fate had not given me a face that pleases him, he would find me detestable."

"You will be vexed with me for what I

am going to say, I know," Euphrosyne went on earnestly; "but I have had it on my mind for a long time, and now is the time to speak. There are some things in life that I hold to be more necessary to happiness than the fulfilment of passionate love; such as a mind at peace with itself, an even existence based upon well-tested principles, a dignified and assured relationship with the outer world. Love is beautiful and good. No lovelier virtue sways the restless human heart; but of itself alone it cannot mould life after the fashion of the cherished ideal. How often is a promising and high-minded career hindered, if not shipwrecked altogether, by a too blind following of what seemed a supreme destiny or a divine instinct, but what was in reality no more than a hasty passion? I do not for a moment aver that the lesson is lost, or that the fruits of it may not in time be precious and sweet-savoured; but when I think of the wasted strength, the ill-spent forces, the life-long remorse of the noble soul that has been so betrayed, I feel that the experience has been gained too dear. You will say what has this to do with René, or with Mr. Carew? Just this, that the one, however noble his ideals may be, has led a restless, wandering, unsatisfied life; whilst the other, by virtue of inheritance, possesses those qualities you would be sure to look for in your husband, self-repose, calm, and the dignity arising from an unassailable social position."

Ingaretha made no answer, but sat at her monitor's feet, pale and impatient.

"I must seem to have a spice of hypocrisy in me to talk thus," Euphrosyne went on, "but indeed it is not so. I am an old woman, and have lived through a great many sad experiences. I know that my people have great virtues and some faults, and I cannot let you cast in your lot with us unwarned. Pardon me, my dear, out of my great love only have I spoken."

And she laid her hands caressingly about the golden hair.

"I know, I understand," Ingaretha said, kissing her friend's thin brown hands; "but I cannot break my promise. Life will be a little difficult perhaps, surely not so difficult as I should have found it otherwise, since I love him."

What could Euphrosyne say? It was very sweet to hear such words from Ingaretha's lips, and to forecast the coming bliss of René's chequered life. Yet had not courage been wanting, she would fain have said more, and laid her own story before the enthusiastic girl as a warning—that half-finished story, so

full of romance, of tragedy, and of vicissitude.

Thus the matter ended. The promise being given was to be held, and the surprise of it passed through the stages of other surprises, beginning in vague doubt and dismay, ending in tranquil acceptance. Monsieur Sylvestre's attitude was, as might be expected, of unmitigated rejoicing. According

to his thinking, Love should be lord of all, and duty, with all other virtues, follow meek servitors in his train. By such love only was the world to be regenerated, and well for all that Ingaretha should lead the way.

"Ah !" he would say with pathetic unconsciousness to his wife, "if I were only René, when René comes out of prison !"



PART VI.

CHAPTER XXV.—NEW-COMERS.



MONSIEUR SYLVESTRE was right when he said that in a week or in a day the Phalanstery might emerge from the dusky habitations of vision into the open light of real existence, like a butterfly from a chrysalis. Within a fortnight

after the utterance of his prophecy no less than three arrivals had happened, and letters of inquiry poured in from all quarters of the civilised world. A well-known political economist once declared it his belief that 'To every one according to his wants' was a maxim which would bring about the salvation of society; and Monsieur Sylvestre's manifesto to Material Bankrupts and Moral Millionaires looked very much like a sermon upon such a text. Certainly his correspondents so read it, and the number of material bankrupts who called themselves moral millionaires wanted a great many things. 'Monsieur,' wrote one, signing himself 'An Adorer of the Unknown,' 'I am a professor of seven languages, and a father of seven children. The most learned of the modern European tongues do not suffice to clothe, feed, and educate my hungry darlings. Will you take them? Your great teacher Fourier charmingly calls the little cooks, dustmen and dustwomen, fruit pickers, and fruit devourers of his Phalanstery—galopins and galopines, sacripans and chenapans, &c. I should be delighted to see my children enrolled on the list. Myself I do not offer. They will be more useful to you than I. Freed from a responsibility for which I feel no calling, I will go to the New World in search of the unknown.'

A second wrote from Alsatia :—

'My husband and I love each other dearly, but do not feel drawn together by that elective affinity without which every-day life becomes a burden. We are quite willing to make the mutual sacrifices necessary for a solution of the difficulty, namely, to seek our counterparts elsewhere. My husband thinks he should find his in Central America, and perhaps some birds to stuff also, of which occupation he is passionately fond. I can cook excellently, and adore Schubert. As soon as you can send us the passage-money—we have just had to give up a dancing-school for want of funds—I will set out for England, and bring with me our two tame parrots, which will amuse you all greatly.'

A third wrote :—

'SIR,—Have supper and bed for two. Coming by the 6.15 train p.m. to-morrow. 'T. C.'

A fourth wrote in French :—

'MESSIEURS ET MESDAMES,—Will you have pity upon a friendless girl who is forsaken by all the world? If only to die on your door-steps, I will come to you.

'AGLÆ'

If Monsieur Sylvestre could have built walls without bricks, not to speak of bricks without straw, the seven hungry darlings, as well as the adorer of Schubert and the parrots, would have been taken in. But the public exchequer was empty, and the household board was already crowded. What with hosts, guests, the hired labourers, and the lame, the halt, and the blind, bidden from the highways to daily feasts, Euphrosyne's resources were already taxed to the utmost. The apple-chamber was almost empty; the vegetable garden was stripped; one by one the fatted fowls had disappeared; large inroads had been made upon the potatoes, protected by earth against snow and frost. Her heart sank within her when she heard the first tidings of the expected visitors, and straightway confided her fears to Maddio.

"Dearest little mother," he said, caressingly, "you forget that all these dear people will work. We can dismiss our two labourers, and that will be a gain of a pound a week, not to speak of the occasional bounties they receive. And perhaps they may come with full purses. Who knows?"

She shook her head incredulously.

"Never, never! We have had the good, the beautiful, the high-souled, and the sorrowful knock at our doors; but the rich, never. And where are these strangers to sleep? There is no room, except in the attic with the owls."

"I love owls," Maddio answered joyfully. "This very night I will take up my abode in the attic with the well-beloved birds."

"But what shall we do for food, dear Maddio? The chickens are gone, and it seems hard to slay the hens when we greatly depend upon eggs."

"I will seek mushrooms and hedgehogs, which you know are dainty eating. Then there are always our pigs."

"Not always. The number is sadly reduced already, and we can't have any young ones for a long time. My heart misgives me when I think of the long winter before us."

"Well, there is a chance that some rich enthusiast may cast in his lot with us, as I have long prophesied," he rejoined blithely.

"But your prophecies don't come true, my poor Maddio."

The entrance of Monsieur Sylvestre put a stop to the conversation.

"Let everything wear a festive appearance to-night," he said gaily. "A profusion of flowers is necessary above all things, and some coloured waxlights for the supper table. By-the-by, what is there for supper, dear wife?"

She assumed a cheerful expression immediately.

"Let us not mislead our friends. We are no epicures," she said. "For my part, I should say that a good potage with bread and ale would amply suffice."

"Nay, we ought to commemorate the happy event with a bottle of wine. What think you, good Maddio?"

Maddio scratched his head, well pleased at the notion, yet hesitating on Euphrosyne's account. He could not find it in his heart to say, yea or nay.

"That is as Fortune wills," he answered at last. "If our cellar is empty, I think we can be merry enough without wine. If a bottle or two is to be found there, I won't say that it might not add some lustre to the occasion."

Euphrosyne contrived to waive the subject, knowing that the cellar was as empty as a cherry-tree at Christmas time; but as good luck would have it, Mrs. Minifie chanced to call that afternoon. Of course Mrs. Minifie heard the news, and of course Mrs. Minifie was invited to supper. As she shook hands

with her hostess at parting she whispered slyly—

"Good company and a bad supper is like riding a fast trotter with a stone in his foot, I take it. There's no go in him, do what you will. I'll tuck a bottle of Mr. Minifie's old port under my arm, and who will be the wiser?"

And she was as good as her word. Mr. Minifie kept the money, but Mr. Minifie could not carry the contents of the larder and cellar about with him; accordingly, whenever Mrs. Minifie wanted to be generous, she made inroads upon the family stores, too often scanty enough, though wine was never wanting. Full of anticipation as a school-girl bound to her first party, Mrs. Minifie set off to Pilgrim's Hatch. Life had gone better with her of late. Not a day passed but she interchanged a friendly hand-clasp with Euphrosyne, Monsieur Sylvestre, or Maddio. They always welcomed her, and to the solitary and neglected, a friendly welcome is like an unexpected ride to a foot-sore wayfarer. There is no longer any feeling of weariness. Wild flowers are pleasant to behold. A fieldfare flying across the road awakens delight.

The sound of her carriage-wheels brought Monsieur Sylvestre and Maddio to the door beaming with delight. Maddio kissed her hand; Monsieur Sylvestre gave her his arm, and led her into the little parlour.

"One of our good friends," he said, "whom I am proud to introduce to Mr. Jack Carrington, barrister. Mr. Harry Carrington, his brother, also barrister."

"Oh, gracious!" Mrs. Minifie said, her sense of propriety forsaking her on a sudden. "What a kettle of fish!—I mean, what a nice party! I hope you are well, sir," she added, turning to Mr. Jack, a sallow-complexioned, slender gentleman with a large lemon-coloured beard and pale blue eyes, the colour of London milk.

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you with a favourable answer, madam. My brother and I are both as ill as can be, or we should not be here. To tell the truth, we have been suffering from a succession of fevers for the last ten years—pray, don't be alarmed—nothing catching. First of all, we had the Hegelian fever, and were laid up with it for months, with violent paroxysms of delirium. No sooner were we fairly recovered than we got an attack of Spiritualism, and were very bad indeed—delirium was nothing to it: we ought to have been shut up like maniacs, instead of which people

encouraged us to cut capers like dancing dogs at a fair. We pulled through somehow; but before we could fairly turn ourselves round, were on our backs with Comtism, and our friends looked on it as a hopeless case. Again we rallied, however, and our convalescence progressed so favourably as to lead to a hope of entire recovery. But, alas, we are now worse than ever!"

"And what is the matter with you this time?" asked Mrs. Minifie, but half comprehending his speech.

"You tell her, Harry," said Mr. Jack mournfully. "I'm dead beat with so much talking."

"You ask what is the matter with us?" Mr. Harry rejoined with some brusqueness. "Why, Socialism, of course. It's on us, and we can no more shake it off than the ague."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," Mrs. Minifie said. "I hope you will shake it off. Suppose you try a little bark and port wine. It is good for all kinds of fevers."

"Dear lady, do you suppose our friend to be serious?" Monsieur Sylvestre said, doing the honours of her bottle of wine with eager hospitality. "Rather regard his speech as the effervescence that precedes the sparkling draught. To-day we sip the wit, to-morrow we drink the wisdom."

"Whose?" asked Mr. Jack, *sotto voce*. Then he added aloud, "For my part, I want neither wit nor wisdom, but a ploughman's muscles, a ploughman's appetite, and a ploughman's insensibility. Give me these, and I will fall down and worship you. What say you, O brother?"

Mr. Harry, who was an exceedingly large, soft, sleepy-looking person, and handsome, if any one can be called handsome whose face is utterly devoid of expression, shrugged his shoulders, uttered an ejaculation of disgust, and relapsed into silence.

"We are on different tacks," pursued the other. "I am all spirit—a flaming wick without a particle of grease. My brother is all tallow and no flame. Teach the divine spark to penetrate that lump of gross materialism, clothe this transcendent entity with the fleshy attributes proper to it, and you will have achieved a great work. To sum up, the one has come hither in quest of a soul, the other in quest of a body; if your spiritual fall short of your corporeal influences, we must seek elsewhere."

Just then another tap was heard at the door, and Maddio rushed to open it excitedly.

"The unknown lady?" ejaculated Madame Sylvestre.

"The unknown lady?" repeated the two brothers inquisitively.

"The unknown lady," echoed Maddio, leading by the hand a young lady, who looked ready to drop of fatigue.

CHAPTER XXVI.—AGLAE'S STORY.

At the request of the stranger, she was at once carried off to her room. It was a tiny chamber in the wall, which had nevertheless been made to look cosy enough by means of carpets, dressed tapestry-wise round the walls, an old-fashioned screen, and other contrivances of warmth. Fire-place, of course, there was none, for which Euphrosyne apologised pathetically, but the young lady seemed disposed to make light of trifles.

"If I can only get to bed and have something to eat," she said, "I shall be the most thankful creature in the world. Ah! madame, you do not know how I have suffered!"

"Poor child, poor child," said Euphrosyne, kissing her on the cheek. "Like ourselves, then, you have tasted misfortune!"

"Madame, I shall never have another happy moment. I have no home, and those who should have been good to me turned out to be my greatest enemies."

"You have lost your mother, perhaps?" said Euphrosyne with a look of hungry tenderness.

"My mother is lost to me, madame. She was a bad woman, and were it not for her I might have been as happy as other girls. But let us not talk of it now."

"True, true. I will fetch you something to eat, and then leave you to sleep," Euphrosyne answered, but having performed her errand, she still lingered. There are some women whom the sight of exquisite girlhood always affects strongly. Perhaps they are moved by the remembrance of having also been sweet and lovely—the joy of it, the triumph of it, often the tragedy of it! or they are touched by reason of their motherly instincts—just such a one was the dreamed-of daughter that never came, or would have been—the little angel buried in infancy; or—God help such mothers!—the unknown child from whom some dread fate has separated them for life.

Pretty as she was and graceful as she was, this young creature was rather prosaic after the manner of convent-bred Frenchwomen. She finished her supper with the utmost composure, paying no heed to Euphrosyne's sympathising glances, and having swallowed her last crumb of bread, asked for more. When the meal finally came to an end, she

held up her cheek to be kissed after a child's careless fashion, saying—

"If you will come to me when it is getting light and lie on my bed, I will tell you my story from beginning to end, and you can advise me what to do. Good night, dear madame."

Euphrosyne went away full of mysterious yearnings and unrest. She felt strangely drawn towards this young stranger who had dropped among them as a little bird found in a chamber unawares. Young, pretty, and neglected, who stood in such need of motherly love as she? The touch of homely commonplace manifested in word and gesture Euphrosyne failed to notice. She only saw what was artless and pathetic, and longed with all the motherly tenderness of her nature to caress, guide, and console.

Euphrosyne slept little that night. For months she had not been in so uneasy a mood. Dreams of days long past, though too well remembered, disturbed her uneasy slumbers. She saw herself in the first home of her married life, before she had beheld the face of him for whom she had sacrificed all, surrounded with the stately circumstance of the first lady in the place, having children on her breast and at her knee, spending her days among flowers and missals and monotonous deeds of charity—a calm, measured life, without surprises. Vision after vision of this kind troubled her till she fairly woke, and, finding herself awake, determined to dream no longer.

Striking a light softly, she found it was nearly time to be up and stirring. And there was the promise made to her new guest. She dressed herself hastily, closed the door softly on her sleeping lord, and proceeded to light the kitchen fire. But when she had swept and dusted and laid the cloth, it was still too early to disturb the traveller. She busied herself a little longer, put out the barn-door key and the milk-pails, opened the dairy shutters, set the pails in readiness. Then she crept up the attic stairs and lay down quiet as a mouse beside the still sleeping girl.

By-and-by, there was a glimmering of light in the little chamber, and the first sounds of the day's business might be heard below; the horses were led to the pond to drink, the hens were summoned to feed, beans and barley-meal were brought down the granary steps for the pigs. By whom? Lying there in the early wintry dawn, Madame Sylvestre had but a vague idea. Perhaps it was Mad-dio, perhaps the old day labourer who had

lately been made a partner in the concern, perhaps her husband or one of the newcomers. These things went mostly by chance at Pilgrim's Hatch.

The cold grey light grew stronger and stronger, and soon the sleeper stirred. Madame Sylvestre lay close as she dare to the warm young thing, partly because she was trembling with cold, and partly because she wished that the awakening might not be sad and lonely. What an abundance of youth and health and beauty were here! The pillow was covered with dark bright hair, the parted lips showed pearly little teeth, every line of the young face, neck, and arms was smooth and rounded as an infant's. How had it come about that such a one should be forlorn and a wayfarer?

At last she was fairly awake, and lay with wide-open eyes turned towards the light and lips parting in a smile.

"You are here as you promised, madame," she said. "Ah! how good it is to feel among friends once more! You will not send me away?"

"Have no fear on that score, dear child."

"I could do a few things to earn my bread, such as silk embroidery, teaching music, and keeping accounts, perhaps. And I do not care much about fine clothes now. But I said I would tell you how I came here, and I will begin. Never was such a sad history, madame. Ah! if I might have a little tea before beginning?"

Of course Euphrosyne trotted down-stairs to fulfil her visitor's behest, and was overwhelmed with thanks.

"I never cared for tea when I was happy," she said, apologetically, "or for any material comforts. A bit of bread and an apple sufficed then, but so much crying has turned me into a gourmande."

"Poor child!" Euphrosyne said, with a tender pressure of the hand. "It is indeed hard to be unhappy at your age."

"And all might have been different had my mother loved me. Listen, madame, and judge for yourself whether I am not right in thinking her the most wicked woman in the world. She had everything that the heart could desire—a beautiful home, a distinguished name, little children; and yet all these failed to content her, and she gave them up to satisfy a moment's fancy! I think, if she is living now, she must have awful moments of remorse. But I omit too much, and tell you things by halves only. Dear madame, I come of one of the best families of France—Roman Catholic, of course—and was edu-

cated with my sisters in a convent. We thought ourselves orphans till one day, just before leaving school, the mother-superior took us into the closet and told us it was not so. 'Your mother,' she said, 'was dead to you from the moment she forsook the Holy Church and her duties to her children. She had been married to your father as a mere child, and he was three times her years. All the more ought she to have showed submission to his will whilst he lived and compliance with his injunctions when she became a widow. But no, with freedom her proud and intractable spirit broke forth as a wild animal turned loose. She would do this, that, anything she willed, and hearkened neither to conscience nor counsellors. There came to the neighbouring town a stranger giving himself out as a follower of Fourier, the great communist (whose heresies may God extirpate!), a teacher of mathematics by profession, young, supremely beautiful, gifted with a marvellous eloquence. Your mother was entrapped in the wiles of Satan, and, instead of clinging to her confessor and the saints, gave way to this unhappy passion. Think of it, my children! she would fain have made this man the head of her house, but, fortunately for you, guardians stepped in. The choice was given her whether she would surrender her children and all the dignities she held as your father's widow, or—her lover. She chose the last, and thus you became, in the spirit, if not in the letter, orphans. Let the example of your mother warn you for ever off the shoals of passion, and, what is hardly less fatal to the happiness of women, intellectual independence. Had your mother submitted her intellect to her religious teachers from the beginning, she would never have become a renegade and a castaway.' 'This, madame, is the substance of what the mother told us, and I could not get it out of my mind. I fancy I am a little like what my mother must have been, for when we returned home the monotonous life of the village became hateful to me. I seized by stealth all the books I could find in the library that told me anything about Fourier and his disciples, and devoured them greedily, knowing all the time how wicked it was. I wanted to find out what had enticed my mother away. And the more I read, the more I became dissatisfied with things around me. I longed for such a career as she had chosen, untrammelled, swayed by inclination, full of love, pleasure, and variety. I say again, I knew how wicked it was, but without such

an example I might have been as good as other girls. My mother must be blamed for all. Well, I went to Paris for the first time, and was there promised in marriage to one of my second cousins, a grave, hard man, double my years, and much given up to public affairs. As you may imagine, I trembled with fear at his lightest word, and dreaded my wedding day as much as if I were going to be led to execution. Could I escape such a fate? was my thought night and day. I dared not avow myself unwilling to marry my cousin. I knew what a wretched lot awaited me as his wife. And so time wore on, and we were married. Madame, need I say what came of it? I found my married life no less intolerable than I had expected; and one day, when my husband had reproached me harshly for some trifling fault, I left him, and went back to my old home. But there I was treated so unkindly that I could not stay: my husband made no overtures of reconciliation; receiving by chance one of your newspapers one day with a book I had ordered from Paris, Lamennais' 'Paroles d'un Croyant,' I determined to go to England and to join your Phalanstery. Tell me, madame, was there ever so sad a story as mine?"

But Euphrosyne had not a word to say. Silently as one in deep sleep she had rested hitherto by the story-teller's side. Softly as a somnambulist she now rose and made her way to the door. In the faint light of the wintry morning the stranger could not see how pale she looked and how she trembled, but she could hear a sob rising to her throat as she returned hastily to the bedside and gave her a broken blessing and a caress.

CHAPTER XXVII.—IN THE DAIRY.

PRECISELY at eight o'clock the bell should have rung for breakfast, but though Pilgrim's Hatch prided itself upon being the most methodical little community in the world, the bell sounded by chance, and indeed breakfast seemed to come by chance upon six mornings out of the seven. As it was everybody's business in general, and nobody's business in particular, to see that the morning meal and the morning's duties were gone through with punctuality, shortcomings were passed over without comment and without reproach. The only rule observed with the utmost rigidity was that each should perform the work he had a liking for—a rule subject to inconveniences under most circumstances, but less so in an industrial army of which each soldier was a commander-in-

chief. On the day in question, which happened to be an unusually damp and disagreeable one, there were pig-styes to clean out, in addition to turnip-cleaning, and one or two farming jobs of a more engaging nature. With the utmost alacrity the men declared themselves ready for turnip-cleaning, &c., but for once the divine principle of the attraction of labour seemed inert: there were no volunteers for the pig-stye. At last Maddio set off contentedly on the unsavoury errand, arming himself with a musical-box by way of panacea, which was placed on the wall, and slosh, slosh went his spade-fuls to the tune of the march in *Faust* and *Robert, toi que j'aime*. Mr. Jack was initiated into the business of the turnip-house, where he sat for three hours on a three-legged stool cleaning Swedes and beet-root gingerly in white kid gloves. Mr. Harry, who needed rather a seraph's wing than a ploughman's muscles, was set to mole-catching; it being supposed that the contact with these highly intelligent little creatures, and the amount of caution required in dealing with them to bring about their own destruction, would develop, if indeed it were capable of development, the intellectual part of Mr. Harry's being. The spiritual part was to be left to music, the æsthetic instruction of the youthful population of the village, and the ladies. Meantime the women were not idle. The only domestic of the family, a sturdy little wench in short petticoats, could not do more than inundate the dairy, break a pile of plates upon occasion, and scour the milk-pails. Madame Sylvestre, therefore, and her young friend, who called herself Aglaë, had, in addition to the house-work, to clean the dairy and make the butter, for it was churning-day, happiest day of all the seven to poor Euphrosyne, ever, like Eve, on hospitable thoughts intent. It was all cold work, and Aglaë said more than once to her companion—

"Dear madame, how you tremble! Let me fetch you a warm shawl."

But Euphrosyne trembled no less when the shawl was wrapped around her, and accused herself of having foolishly caught cold.

"I am always forgetting that we are not in our sunny beautiful Algérie," she said, "and did some garden-work yesterday without my bonnet on. Now you are here to take care of me, I shall not do such foolish things."

"Indeed you must not," answered Aglaë, kissing her. "I will look after you, as if you were my own mother, and had been kind to me."

"No, no, no," Euphrosyne said, drawing

back with almost a frightened look. "I am not good enough to be so treated. You don't know me. God be thanked—none know me—as I know myself."

Aglaë went on with her dairy-work disconcertedly. She was a novice in the art of rolling butter, and blundered, perhaps with some intention. The alternating tenderness and reserve of her companion struck her as strange in the extreme. She felt aggrieved that her story should as yet have received no expressions of sympathy. If such a story could not touch Madame Sylvestre's heart, could anything touch it? There are natures, not the highest certainly, yet capable of good things, that seem to live upon the outgiving sympathies of others; and will not rest without a constant display of feeling, whether of interest, admiration, or affection. This habit of casting about for a sentimentality, often inactive, is apt to develop into selfish appropriation of other people's kindness, on a par with the amusing propensities of the aphismilking ant well known to naturalists. Aglaë, ever on the alert to be pitied or coaxed, bore up with her disappointment as well as she could till the heavier part of the day's work was over. When they sat down to needlework she could no longer hide her thoughts.

"Can't we talk a little now?" she asked. "I am very impatient to hear what advice you have to give me, and as yet you have not said a word. Dear madame—mother, if I may so call you—"

"Oh! yes, if you will—but again I tell you that I do not deserve that sacred name."

"Have you never had any children?" asked Aglaë, opening her large eyes.

She could not believe that the passionate caress of the morning was anything but an outburst of motherly feeling.

"My children were all lost to me in their infancy. No childless woman was ever so unhappy as I. Yes, call me mother, and love me and trust me, and you shall be to me as my own child," Euphrosyne said between tears and kisses. "God does not send children to the happy and the good only, but to the erring and the unfortunate, to teach them his mercy, and out of his mercy you are sent to me."

"And *notre père*, Monsieur Sylvestre, may I talk freely to him too? Will he love me also?" Aglaë said, ever on the alert to discover more sympathy.

"I am sure he will, but do not talk to him of yourself just yet. I will tell you why some other time," Euphrosyne answered

agitatedly. "He is sure to be good to you and love you for having come to us."

"Would he not tell me what to do? I must be counselled."

"Have a little patience, dear child. This very day I will take you to see our best friend and protector, a lady who has right thoughts about all things. To her you can freely pour out your troubles."

Aglaë looked unconvinced. She could not conceive of any other counsellor to whom she could so readily go as to Monsieur Sylvestre. There was his great personal fascination to begin with, and what woman, especially a woman who has been disappointed in love and marriage, can resist the charms of a sweet voice, a noble carriage, and a beautiful face? That very morning he had come into the little sitting-room where she was busily dusting, had thrown himself at full length upon the sofa, begging her to talk him to sleep. As he lay thus taking, according to his habit, a few minutes' rest in the midst of the day's labours, Aglaë looked and looked again, wishing she had been young with him and chosen by him of all other women in the world. Monsieur Sylvestre's beauty, far from vanishing with age, had but grown more and more apparent. His eyes, always fine, shone now with a tenderer, more insinuating lustre; his smile was warmer and more universal than of old; what he had lost in physical perfection he had gained in spiritual subtlety. The look of that undying youthfulness of spirit with which he was largely endowed, embellished limbs and lineaments in spite of failing person and whitened hair. Such an old age as his—beautiful, self-indulgent, Quixotic—is especially captivating to those reared among rigid formulas and prosaic ideals.

Aglaë fluttered about him coyly as a maiden in the presence of a half-declared lover. One moment she fancied he would be cold, and wrapped a shawl about his feet; the next she thought the fire would scorch his face, and placed a screen so as to shield him, he smiling and nodding approval. At length, seeing that she was in no humour to let him sleep, he held out his hand, and motioned her to sit on a low stool at his feet.

"Welcome, my child," he said smiling. "It is a little late for me to say that word, but you will already have understood that you are among friends. Little enough we have to offer, and yet, how much, if one takes in at a glance the necessities of the grand primitive human soul! Work, which, when glorified by the power of attraction, is the

richest heritage given by God to man; love, over whose kingdom all should have boundless sway; self-development and solidarity, by which we mean the fullest play given to all the faculties, social and individual—all this shall you have in full measure, running over." His eyes turned towards her with a friendly expression, and then closed. She sat still as a mouse, and soon he fell into a soft sleep, holding one of her little hands in his.

Aglaë confessed to herself that she had never in her life beheld so adorable a being. Had the lover of her erring mother been such a man, she felt as if it was in her heart to pardon her!

CHAPTER XXVIII.—INGARETHA'S FLITTING.

WHO has not, at some time or other, gone to the friend of his bosom for bread and come away with a stone? The old affection has no more stirred from its abiding-place than the sun from the heavens, but some cloud is in the way, and it cannot shine forth, making the day that dawned sadly the brightest of the year. When Madame Sylvestre set out for the Abbey, accompanied by Aglaë, she never doubted that the great nightmare brooding over her spirit would be transformed at Ingaretha's touch, if not into an angel with healing on its wings, at least into a winged sorrow touched with the hues of heaven. But Ingaretha's whole being was for the time self-absorbed and self-centred. A fever of expectancy and inquietude was wasting her day by day. The passion she had never believed in till now—how little do we know ourselves till the supreme moment of self-renunciation comes!—so entirely absorbed her being, that for the moment, other things lost their proper weight and importance. Euphrosyne found her, flushed and discomposed, at her writing-table, little Bina Greenfield stamping and sealing letters for her demurely, whilst, through an open door, might be seen the figure of Amy kneeling before an open packing-case.

"You are going away?" asked Euphrosyne, with a dismayed look.

"Yes; I cannot stay here. And poor Amy's children want a change after their whooping-cough. I am going to take them all to the sea. I am sure it is the right thing to do."

"Good heavens! are you ill?" Euphrosyne said, taking her hand tenderly. "Your cheeks are hot, your hands tremble, your eyes are too bright. What is it?"

"Nothing, nothing. I had intended to



"WELCOME, MY CHILD," HE SAID SMILING.

run away without saying good-bye, to escape questioning," Ingaretha answered, running her fingers distractedly through her hair. "The place is dull, and I have not enough to do. That is all the matter, I assure you. But after we have had enough of the sea, I am going to London, perhaps to Nice—anywhere so long as I get away from Culpho."

Euphrosyne felt as if a cold hand were laid on her heart. A few minutes ago, all troubles seemed bearable because of Ingaretha's love and presence; now, Ingaretha's coldness and departure seemed the greatest trouble of all. For a few moments she was speechless, stunned by what in reality was the most natural occurrence in the world, and, a day or two ago, would have by no means affected her deeply. Then the bitterness passed. She put away her own discomfiture and talked cheerfully of the proposed journey.

"You are wise to go away," she began.

"I should think it is wise," Bina put in, nodding her little head sagely. "Nobody ever thought of taking us to the sea before, we want so much bread and butter. And then how baby screams! The people who have no babies and don't want a quartern loaf at a meal must lead an easy life of it, mustn't they?"

"That depends, little Bina," Euphrosyne said, giving the little maiden a kiss. "But there is a lady waiting in the drawing-room for me. Will you go and talk to her and amuse her till I come?"

When the child had gone, and Amy had disappeared from the inner room, she told Ingaretha Aglaë's arrival and history. But what a different story to that she had purposed to tell! How common-place and matter-of-fact it sounded! How unmoved was her listener! She chided herself for having used words with so little soul in them, forgetting that if—

"A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it,"

so does a tragedy's. Had she fallen at Ingaretha's feet, saying, with agonized tears, "She of whom I have spoken is my own child. Here is the mother who forsook her—whose example brought her to this. Pity and forgive"—she felt sure that the surprise would still have been tardy and the sympathy lukewarm.

Euphrosyne rejoined her young companion with an expression of dejection, and the two started off drearily on their homeward walk through the snow; but, ere they had gone a dozen yards from the house, a footman came

running after them with a message. The ladies were to be driven home in the brougham, and were first to have tea with Mrs. Greenfield, Miss Meadowcourt desired him to say. They turned back willingly. Bina met them on the doorstep, and led the way to a snug little breakfast-parlour, far away from poor, sick-at-heart, fevered Ingaretha. Amy sat down to the tea-table with a beaming face. Bina entertained the company. An hour passed like a moment.

And at the end of the hour, just as they were on the point of starting home, a beautiful golden head peeped in, brightening everything like the sun. It was Ingaretha's real self, not her ghost, this time, and she sat down and took Pennie on her knee, and gave one hand to Euphrosyne, after the old way.

"I was brutal in my behaviour to you just now," she said. "Forgive me. I am ill, I think, or perhaps out of my senses. I shall be better by-and-by."

Then she turned to Aglaë, and talked kindly to her, but the young Frenchwoman was not easily to be won over. It had seemed to her preposterous that Ingaretha could have any trouble so important as to eclipse her own, and hungry as she was for sympathy, she wilfully withheld response to the proffered cordiality. By Ingaretha, Euphrosyne's sulky young guest was forgotten ere she had been out of the house half-an-hour.

The next day the little party set out for the south of England; and what a journey of enchantment was that! Poor Amy's entire experience of travel had begun and ended with a fortnight's honeymoon at Henley-on-Thames, and she was like a child in her eager appreciation of everything—the journey to London; the two days' sight-seeing; finally, the mixed land-and-sea journey to that verdant little Paradise of ours, which Sir Philip Sidney might have had in his mind when he described the scenery of his Arcadia. No wonder that to the curate's wife and children the place seemed peopled with good fairies, an island of the Blest, a realisation of childhood's choicest visions! Seldom, indeed, is the sunshine absent for an entire day; and whilst it is winter on the other side of the sea, here the violets bloom, the banks are verdant, the sky is blue on the shortest day of the year. And after a time Ingaretha attained that peace she had longed for during the last month. The walks and rides along the sea-shore, the abundant pleasantness of the climate and scenery, the daily repetition of quiet enjoyments, did more to restore her to physic

and mental health than any more exciting mode of life could have done. The softness of the air acted like an opiate upon her senses, bringing back the old, delicious habit of perfect sleep. The irritability induced by over-concentration of thought passed away. She became again the Ingaretha of old.

At twilight the children would gather round her knee and beg for stories. Unconsciously she had fallen into the habit of telling René's story, and they loved it best of all. They listened breathlessly whilst she told of his

unhappy childhood, his wanderings, his desolation, his imprisonments, and his patriotic ambitions; asking, when she stopped, "How does it end? Does he marry some beautiful lady? Does he turn out to be a prince?" and so on. To make them happy, she said "Yes;" sighing softly to herself when the telling of the story was ended.

Happy indeed is the friend of little children! Like daisies, robins' songs, and other wayside pleasures, the love of the little ones is ever at hand to brighten common homes and dull places. Ingaretha wondered



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at the affection of Amy—herself a child—and Amy's children for her. They would sit at her feet looking up at her face, or would stroke and kiss her hair, her dress, her hands, as if she were something more than mortal. And why? Simply because she had been kinder to them than any one in the world—had not only held a cup of water, according to scriptural injunction, to "one of these little ones," but had taken good heed of the quality of the water, seeing it was fresh from the spring, sparkling to behold, good to drink. They were all good and sweet; and

she loved them none the less on account of Bina's mended frock or Pennie's ill-shod little feet.

Thus time wore on, and Amy had to go home. Ingaretha carried off Bina to London, and gave the little maiden a round of dissipation; what with the Crystal Palace, and the pantomimes, Bina was very near losing her quaint pretty old womanishness altogether, and becoming a child again. They stayed in the house of a maternal uncle of Ingaretha's, a stately old gentleman, who had no particular love of curates or large-

eyed, half-starved-looking little girls always in want of shoes or frocks.

"Beware of playing patroness, my dear," he would say. "Have nothing to do with shiftless people and shabby-genteel people, and people with immense families. Giving to the downright poor is another matter, and is safe and respectable."

From this house Ingaretha went to visit others of her kinsmen and kinswomen, knowing well enough it was for the last time. In a few months they would regard her as irrecoverably lost to them as if she had married a gipsy or eloped with some schoolfellow's husband. She determined to behave graciously now, and at least leave such a remembrance as should not disgrace her.

"Do you love all your relations?" asked sage Bina one day.

"Not all, of course, you strange child."

"Because I don't like relations at all.

They are always scolding. I think they are of very little use except to go to each other's funerals."

"But, Bina, some relations do not scold at all, and are always good to each other."

"Very few," Bina said, shaking her head. "Mamma has a great many, and whenever they come to see us, she is cross and miserable for days after. No, I don't like relations. I think it is a pity they were invented."

About a fortnight after Amy's departure Ingaretha was startled by receiving the following telegram from Peasemarsch:—

"DEAR FRIEND,—We are in great trouble, and unspeakably need your counsel. Can you come to us if only for a day?

"EUPHROSYNE."

Of course she started for Suffolk by the next train.



PART VII.

CHAPTER XXIX.—WINTER AT PILGRIM'S HATCH.



THE year opened favourably at Pilgrim's Hatch. Why, indeed, should not things prosper? The land was of that good quality—called mixed soil—dearest of all to the heart of the farmer. Prices were fair. Their stock thrived. Nothing

seemed wanting but good crops to lay the foundation of a permanent prosperity. Even Euphrosyne's heart grew light at times when she went again and again to the family cash-box and found it replenished. A little money goes a long way among the believers in an age of gold, and so long as a guinea remained, none dreamed of poverty to come.

The actual poverty around them was a greater trouble. We who fare sumptuously and sleep warm, shiver at the first mention of winter, and talk of it as an enemy; but what does winter mean to us? The household board is spread a little more bountifully, friendly hospitalities are carried on with unwonted vigour, all over the house fires are kept burning, from the farthest corners of the earth soft furs are brought to keep us warm, life is made twice as luxurious and twice as indolent as in summer. But to the poor the seasons come differently, and winter means the combined miseries of cold, hunger, and despair. Take these happy Suffolk villages, for instance, where the wealth of the land is so abundant as to give one an idea of the golden age of Greek fabulists. In spite of bequests of living and dead benefactors, and donations of coals and flannel, winter brought an amount of suffering to the weak and the aged of which only

eye-witnesses have any idea. For in every parish, frost and snow throws three or four men out of work, and some of these will be rheumatic sexagenarians, hitherto independent, and others fathers of families. Children are born in cold weather, delicate people fall sick in cold weather, old people die in cold weather, and what a burden of anxiety does each of these events imply! The measure of barley and the flask of oil are not increased as they were to the Shunammite woman, and meantime the week-old mothers must be nourished, the consumptive girl must have medicine, the aged grandmother must be laid under the sod. Talk not of the workhouse, O matter-of-fact philanthropist! for you know not what you do. No more aristocratic spirit exists than that animating the heart of our sturdy Suffolk ploughman. If he is so unfortunate as to live past work and have no good child, son or daughter, to give him a corner by the fireside, he lays aside his spade and his reaping-hook with bitter tears, and betakes himself to the prison dreaded a thousand times more than the grave. The few pleasures and privileges—alas that they should be so few!—he enjoyed whilst able to work, have vanished for ever; the walk to church with friend and neighbour, the friendly pipe and tankard of ale, the little garden lovingly cultivated, the farmhouse sights and sounds familiar and dear, the bit of local news gossiped over with such unction—upon all these have closed the walls of a living tomb, and there is nothing more to do but await the end.

Monsieur Sylvestre, Euphrosyne, and Maddio were far from ignoring the suffering around them. They gave what indeed they had not to spare, went without bare necessities that others might be fed and clothed. Ingareth, of course, gave of her abundance freely; but among the tenants of Pilgrim's Hatch a vast and magnanimous scheme was floating, which promised to do what was beyond almsgiving, however princely. They resolved, when Michaelmas came, to follow in the wake of Assington's and Ralahine, to add if possible to their farm, and by making it a co-operative concern, lift at least half a dozen labourers from the slough of poverty-stricken dependence into freedom and prosperity. At present the scheme was kept a secret.

CHAPTER XXX.—MR. MINIFIE'S PROPHECIES.

MEANTIME, the business of the farm was carried on with renewed enthusiasm from Christmas till Easter. A few bullocks were purchased in order to fatten for the spring fair, and money was freely laid out upon oil-cake, mangel-wurzel, and other necessary adjuncts to the process. How Maddio's face beamed as he helped his compeers to dole out these delicacies to the large-eyed, soft-coated, gentle things ! With what exhilaration he scattered the bright yellow swede turnips to the hungry sheep bleating in their wintry fold ! Then there was the less poetic work of the ordinary day labour to be done, the hedging and ditching, and what could by no means be called poetic at all, the farmyards to be cleaned out, and the manure spread on the fallow land. When February came, there were the barley stubbles to be ploughed up, and as the weather was mild and open, beans and peas were put in. Our grandsires, at least so runs the Suffolk tradition, used to prove the temperature of the land by sitting on the ground ; if it was cold, seed-time was not come, if the contrary, the sowing began. That was in the time when the saw held good, 'When blackthorns blow, then barley sow,' but that was in the time when nut-brown ale had not as yet been superseded by the decoctions of Bass and Allsopp ; and now the barley is got in as early as possible, the earlier the sowing the better the quality, being found the rule. With the advance of spring came a period of greater activity, the wheat to be cleaned, horse-hoeing, harrowing, ridging the land intended for root crops, and other tasks equally important.

How happy were these Utopians as they performed their work ! To them, nothing was mean, sordid, or common. There was a good naturalist among them, our old friend Maddio, and at the touch of the naturalist's wand, every inch of homely soil becomes enchanted ground. To plough a field or trim a hedge was to unravel new secrets of animal and vegetable life, microscopic, yet marvellous ; to live a day longer out-of-doors was to become sovereign of a hundred beautiful realities hitherto alien or undiscovered. One day it was some new property of a flower he made out, another, some hitherto doubtful idiosyncrasy of bird or insect that he settled for once and for all ; undreamed of analogies and generalisations await him at every turn ; and let none smile down largely, taking his triumphs and his disappointments to be a

light and childish thing. Is it not by such steps as these that we are brought nearest to the great mysteries and greater simplicities of the universe ? The kingdom of art lies perhaps out of the reach of every one, but there is ample opportunity for all the naturalists in the world ; we have only to stretch out our hand, and the door of nature opens without any magical Sesame.

All this time Aglaë was the only apparent element of disturbance in the place. She could not endure the spectacle of peace and happiness from which she was shut out, and one by one, Maddio and the brothers Carrington were taken into her confidence and made unhappy. From Monsieur Sylvestre she only held back, being bound by a promise to Euphrosyne. He knew, of course, the vague outline of her story, but nothing of her birth, parentage, and family. Because Aglaë's history would have perplexed and disconcerted him, it was studiously withheld, as was everything else that might have had the same tendency, whether scantiness in the larder, a financial crisis, an experimental fiasco. Whatever happened, he must be kept happy.

But there were other elements of trouble floating about, of which at present they did not know. Originality is the one unpardonable sin in country places, and it was little likely that such flagrant crimes committed daily and hourly against routine should escape notice. The good humour of the neighbourhood, like the sunshine of a tempestuous day, was fictitious. Black clouds loomed in the distance. Already the growl of distant thunder might be heard. Omens of stormy weather were evident to all those who had ears to hear or eyes to see. But none were seen or heard by the joy-loving tenants of Pilgrim's Hatch.

One day Mrs. Minifie came to give what she called a friendly warning. It was her fullest determination to beat about the bush, but on finding Madame Sylvestre alone, the temptation to be sensational was irresistible.

"Goodness gracious !" she cried, floundering about the little room like a seal in the mud. "The dear woman sits reading her book as composedly as if there were no such thing as a devil on the prowl or bad folks putting their heads together. My good creature, don't you know that you are sitting on hot coals, and your good man's life is not worth an empty cotton reel ? Pray, get up and bestir yourself, instead of looking as innocent as a turtle before being cut up for a dinner-party."

Madame Sylvestre dropped the little volume

she was reading, her invariable companion, the *Paroles d'un Croyant*, and looked up in quiet dismay.

"Dear Madame Minifie," she said, "there are no marauding Arabs here, and no Imperial police prying into everything. What need we fear?"

"That's just like you clever people," Mrs. Minifie said impatiently. "You know all about the stars millions of miles off, and run your heads against the first brick wall you come near. I tell you, you're no more safe here than you were in the country of earthquakes, Mahometan assassins, famines, and plagues and burnings."

"Oh, Heavens!" said Madame Sylvestre, "I thought that here we might safely await our dying day! And we have got a home that the most fastidious might envy. Never did I so adore a place as I adore this."

"I should have thought you had chopped and changed about so often that one place was as much like another to you as a cabbage to a caterpillar! Adoring a place, too, sounds rather heathenish coming from the mouth of a pious person, doesn't it? But I tell you that you must all look sharp if you wish to stay here and keep a whole skin."

"Of what crime do people accuse us?" asked Madame Sylvestre, beginning to tremble with retrospective misgivings. "We have done no one any harm, and have tried to be friendly to all."

"That's just it," Mrs. Minifie said. "You have been doing good to the people, and they don't like it. Nobody does. From morning till night you have doctored and preached, and gone out of your way to put things right, and it was only natural that you should come to be looked upon as enemies. There's Mr. Whitelock, the parson, a man who calls himself enlightened. He will be the first to tar and feather you all."

"Surely a Christian and a gentleman of education can but think well of us for treating the poor people like our brothers and sisters?" Euphrosyne asked sadly.

"Brothers and sisters be fiddle-de-dee, my dear. Of course, it's all true; but it's mighty unpleasant to grand folks to be told so. If the clergy are not grand folks, who are? No doubt things are changing—the sooner the better, say I. I always thought that the world wanted mending myself; but what about those who set about the mending? I wouldn't stand in your shoes for something!"

"We have only taught the poor people," Madame Sylvestre answered with humility,

"and helped them when they were in trouble, doctored them when sick, and so forth. To make sure of good on earth is undoubtedly next door to making sure of heaven hereafter. In this we have but co-operated with such men as the rector."

"How the dear creature talks!" Mrs. Minifie cried. "One would think she were as innocent as a chick with one foot out of the shell! Why, I never said you and your husband and Maddy—God bless him—and that sweet dear lovely Ingaretha were not worth a shipful of parsons and bishops. I only tell you what other folks think, and they look upon you as a set of Atheists and Mormons, and that unless we very soon get rid of you, we shall all go to the bad together. There, I've told you the truth, and your own mother couldn't do more. There's Monsieur Sylvestre coming. I'll begin over again for his benefit."

"For the love of God, not a word," Euphrosyne said with an imploring gesture. "I will think of what is best to be done, but let us not disturb his peace."

"Nonsense! How can women expect their husbands to be good for anything whilst they treat them as if they were made of gingerbread? It is Monsieur Sylvestre's goings on and not yours that people most object to."

"He is good as an angel, and even his imprudences are dictated by a love of his fellows," Euphrosyne answered. "I entreat you to be silent."

"As you like, of course. But remember I've cried 'Wolf,' and if you stay like silly sheep to be gobbled up, it isn't my fault."

And with that Mrs. Minifie went, for the first time, feeling disinclined to hear Monsieur Sylvestre's honeyed discourse. She had fallen in love with him as much as any one, but she had fallen in love with Euphrosyne at the same time, and being herself an ill-used wife, she was ever on the alert to discover others equally victimized.

CHAPTER XXXI.—THE ENEMY STRIKES IN THE DARK.

"WHY did that dear lady go away?" asked Monsieur Sylvestre, dropping into an easy chair, just as Mrs. Minifie's carriage might be seen—dark and ill-omened as some cumbersome beast of prey—diving into the gloom of the wintry twilight. As Euphrosyne made no immediate answer, he went on:—

"If ever there was a person quite exceptionally charming, that person is our good friend, Madame Minifie. Ever self-forgetting and mindful of the present only, what a

lesson does she teach the selfish, anxious, unenjoying world! And then with what infantine zest will she throw herself into such small pleasures as chance or kindness may put in her way! I find Mrs. Minifie a person to envy and imitate. She has about her withal a pleasing—I might say idiotic, only the word is unacceptable—well, I will call it humorous naïveté, wholly at variance with the prose of respectable life. I never yet heard her give utterance to a hack sentiment or cut-and-dry ha'porth of morality. Like a child she speaks from the heart rather than from the head."

"Poor soul! She is sadly tried by her husband, a man of coarse appetites and cold heart. I cannot help looking upon that man as our enemy."

Monsieur Sylvestre laughed lightly.

"We have no enemies here. I would for our dear friend's sake that her husband were made of a finer metal, but as far as we are concerned I am sure we have no truster well-wisher than our good counsellor Minifie. Why, there isn't a day that we are not reminded of his interest in our prosperity."

"Methinks he is over-officious and careful in matters that do not concern him. But I have no wish to misjudge any one," Euphrosyne said apologetically, "though, if he is our friend, surely then there is no one we may not entirely trust."

She said this absently, forgetting for the moment that she was not soliloquising alone, a habit she had gained during her long period of solitude. Startled at her own words, she was fain, too late, to retract them. But Monsieur Sylvestre only smiled and made answer:—

"My precious child, is it not thy only fault that thou beckonest the evil hour which might otherwise pass us by? In our beloved France, in the wilds of America, in beautiful Algérie, it was always so. Fortune smiled upon us till thy cunning eyes saw the ill-omened form of her sister Mishap in the distance. Trust me, ah! have I not said it a thousand times—upon those that smile, good fortune smiles."

Euphrosyne was silent. Like a child that has been reprov'd, she sat with hands meekly folded, and filling eyes. She knew well enough how differently things would have gone with them, had she followed her own instincts of self-preservation, but would not have contradicted him for worlds.

"Reproach me not with that contrite face," he said, holding out his hand, which she kissed with almost abject fervour and gra-

titude. "It is the one fault of your sex to be over-anxious, whilst ours must be accused of a thousand. Well, amuse me by telling more of the machinations of this redoubtable adversary. Will he cast us into prison as did the Imperialists in France? Will he sow the seeds of anarchy among us as traitors did in the Far West? Will he burn us out and pillage us as did the poor ignorant Arabs of the Tell? Never think it, dear love. It is poverty that makes man enemy of man, and our good neighbour Minifie is an agricultural Midas, turning all he touches into pure gold. We are poor enough here among a race of millionaires to sleep the sleep of safety."

"True," Euphrosyne answered. "By the side of such men as he, we are poor indeed, though millionaires in comparison to our former selves."

"Again comparing and looking back? Oh! Have done with it, I beseech you. What treasure have we poor mortals to compare in preciousness with the God-sent boon of the present, that draught held to our lips in golden goblets, if rejected once, rejected for ever. Whether we were poor and miserable yesterday is of little moment, what will befall us to-morrow we must leave to the gods; but a happy day makes us all heirs. Let us enter upon our heritage joyfully, ring the bells, hang out banners and garlands, teach the youths and maidens to dance to merry music, without wondering what will happen next. Are not indeed such heritors more enviable than those who come into a goodly estate, since their title-deeds are burdened neither by duties nor mortgages, but come untaxed like summer sweetness to the bees? Miracles never cease whilst trust and love endure, and what miracles have we not witnessed? A few months back we came here naked, hungry, penniless, and lo! now we fare like princes—less by reason of our own intrinsic deserts, than of faith in ourselves and affection on the part of our friends."

He threw himself on the sofa with a sigh of supreme satisfaction, and taking up a volume of poems read aloud one or two fragments. His voice, naturally sweet and strong, had been so trained as to prove an instrument in his hands capable of expressing every shade of feeling. Euphrosyne had never accustomed herself to regard her husband's elocution as a common pleasure, and plied her needle softly so as not to interfere with the ever well-beloved magical sound.

Half an hour passed thus, and by-and-by,

Aglæ stole in to listen, then Maddio, then the brothers Carrington. Sleet was falling, and they found it much pleasanter to sit in the cosy little fire-lit parlour, hearing favourite poems read in a choice manner, than to wade knee-deep through the sloshy farm-yards carrying in pailfuls of new milk and of that compound delectable to porkers, called in Suffolk parlance *swill*. The Fourierist doctrine of the attractiveness of labour often flagged on such days, but somehow the pigs got fed and the horses got cleaned down; it was surprising how things seemed to take care of themselves.

Daylight waned, the book was laid aside, and Monsieur Sylvestre began to discourse. A more reverend-looking figure could be hard to find than that of the teacher of Pilgrim's Hatch, as he sat in his arm-chair in an attitude of easy grace, touched with just a shade of prophetic assumption. His long silky white locks lay upon the collar of his black velvet coat—some fair admirer's gift—his long white hands accompanied his words with rhythmic gestures, his graceful stately person disposed with dignity, his eyes glowing with passionate eloquence.

"Think," he said, "of the beautiful mysteriousness which casts a halo around the daily life of communists like ourselves. The apostles of a new religion, we open our arms both to rich and poor, saints and penitents, the learned and the simple, and we know not what a day, nay, an hour may bring forth. This very moment there is perhaps on his way to us some wealthy believer in regenerated humanity, some princely philanthropist ready to found a palatial Phalanstery, some rich seeker after good, who up till now has sought for what he thirsted in vain. Miracle-workers, indeed, are those who devote their lives to social reform, and indeed we may ourselves be called miracle-workers, having assembled in this isolated spot, youth and loveliness"—whereupon he inclined his head to Aglaë—"intellectual strength"—this was said with a wave of the hand towards the brothers Carrington—"a subtle solver of nature's riddles, and an ever-patient presider over the daily feasts of sociability, reason, and affection."

At these latter compliments the eyes of Euphrosyne and Maddio were moistened with joyful tears, all faces beamed, and a pleasurable silence reigned throughout the little assembly, broken at last by a loud knock at the front door.

"Did I not speak aright? Without doubt this is some noteworthy convert to the doctrines of our great master, Monsieur Syl-

vestre said smiling radiantly, "or some angelic messenger of sympathy and affection from far-off fellow-workers. Sweet wife, open the door and bid the strangers hearty welcome."

Euphrosyne rose, Maddio too inquisitive to wait the result, followed her; the rest, all but Monsieur Sylvestre, stood on tiptoe, peering into the little entrance-hall. Two dark figures presented themselves, and after a little parleying, Euphrosyne darted back to the sitting-room trembling in every limb.

"What alarms you?" asked her husband with a tranquil solicitude.

"The police, the police!" she said, every word freighted with terror inexpressible. "Then, Madame Minifie was right. We are in danger of our lives."

Aglæ screamed, Maddio turned white to the lips, even Monsieur Sylvestre showed signs of agitation.

"Afraid of a couple of policemen," said Mr. Harry, suddenly roused from his monosyllabic condition, "Good Lord! good Lord!"

"You forget what suffering they have before caused us," Euphrosyne said, shivering from head to foot. Then making a violent effort, she controlled herself so far as to turn to the unwelcome strangers and say:—

"Please enter, gentlemen, and pardon me, I pray you, for having been discourteous in my agitation. I knew not what I did."

"Come on, Tommie," said one factotum of the law to the other; "let's out with it and get away as quick as we can."

Tommie thus apostrophised, read in a solemn voice a summons issued by the parish against Monsieur Sylvestre, commanding him to appear before the magistrate on the next day of sitting, to answer a charge of having disturbed Mr. Whitelock's congregation by open-air preaching at his last discourse.

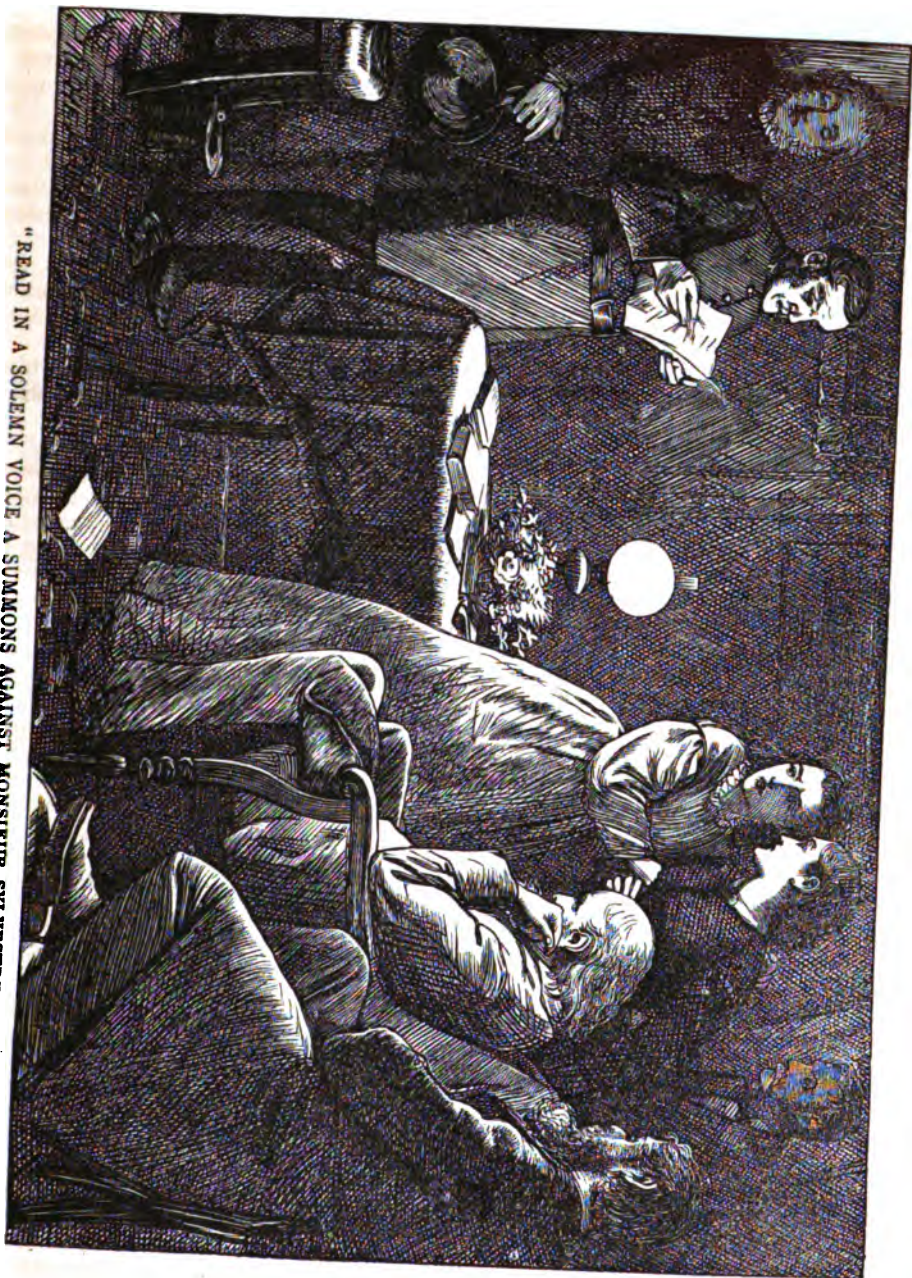
The policemen then withdrew, leaving behind them much more uneasiness than the occasion warranted. The brothers Carrington did what they could to allay the fears of the assembly, and Monsieur Sylvestre affected an unconcerned air; but a chill had fallen on the spirits of all. One by one, each became silent and self-centered. The apparent danger, like the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, threatened to burst over their heads, overwhelming and destroying.

CHAPTER XXXII.—VILLAGE RADICALISM.

As soon as the news spread of Monsieur Sylvestre's forthcoming appearance, before the magistrates, people began to prick up their

"READ IN A SOLEMN VOICE A SUMMONS AGAINST MONSIEUR SYLVESTRE."

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ears and discover for themselves the viper they had harboured in their bosoms unawares. Not an hour passed but some awful discovery was made, or some dreadful conclusion arrived at about him and his belongings. The weird, well-known Peasemارش legend became fresh in everybody's memory; and was not the wizard of the story among them again, beautiful, wily, fair-tongued, working mischief in the dark? There were black looks and lowering frowns for poor innocent Maddio and Madame Sylvestre whenever they happened to be in the village, insubordinate remarks and rude gestures from the pupils of the night-school, coarse familiarities and insinuations by no means refined from the audience at the Academy. As yet, this spirit had not been manifested before the august cause of so much obloquy. Whatever might be Monsieur Sylvestre's faults or crimes, he was as yet shielded from insult by a halo of dignity, self assertion, pathos, one knows not what name to give to a quality as difficult to describe as a perfume. It is enough that no one slighted, no one insulted, no one looked askance at him.

At the village forum daily scenes took place now that would have been laughable but for the undercurrent of ill-feeling perplexity always engenders among the ignorant. One day Tat Tideman, the village cobbler, barber, and wag, declared it his opinion that the tenants of Pilgrim's Hatch were no better than the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, Monsieur Sylvestre was no woman's husband in particular, and *vice versa*.

"Go it, Tat," cried a quiet pious man who never did any harm, but loved a little broad sensationalism when it came in his way.

And Tat did "go it."

"Gentlefolks are much like other folks, I take it, when skinned of their fine clothes," he went on; "and Miss Meadowcourt—well, I don't wish to say a word against a lady who has always been kind to us—but Miss Meadowcourt is as near like the rest as could be. I know something about Miss Meadowcourt, I would tell anybody for a pot of beer."

"Come, that's stingy," said a voice from the crowd.

"Out with it, Tat," cried another; "brag first and beer afterwards."

Thus appealed to, Tat began in a round-about way to tell his story.

"Don't you suppose I keep people shaved or shod without knowing within a little what their heads and their heels are about, and Father Sylvestre's tongue goes like a trotting

mare when he has had a good dinner. You will hear something queer one of these days about Miss Meadowcourt, I'll warrant."

"Give over, Tat," said one of the best men in the village, a sober, first-class ploughman. "Slander not thy betters, man; never yet did slippery tongue do a thriving trade."

Tat, a little wiry, bull-dog fellow, who was, intellectually and physically, the terror of the village, though too good-natured to be a bully, here doubled his fists and knit his brows.

"If you weren't an old woman I'd black your eyes nicely," he said, "for teaching your grandfather how to crack walnuts; but I can tell all of you, the best man here as well as the worst, if indeed there is best and worst among such a lot, thus much, that when you know as much as I do, you'll stand on your heads unbidden."

This did not satisfy the assembly, and by little and little they wormed it out. Miss Meadowcourt, the rich lady, the owner of almost all the land in the parish, the future wife, as they all thought, of Mr. Carew, himself rich in dignities and acres, Miss Meadowcourt, declared to be the prettiest young lady for miles round, was going to do what, think you? Become a nun, and enter the new Protestant convent of St. Beowulf's? Worse than that. Marry parson, old enough to be her father? That was nothing to it. Give it up? Well, then, Miss Meadowcourt was going to marry one of those poverty-stricken foreigners who had hung around the Abbey for the last few months, the one now away, who used to say he was no better than us, and had to work for his bread; and why away? Because he was put in prison for having tried to assassinate the Emperor of the French.

Most were silent.

"You don't say so?" said one.

"I don't believe it," said another. "Miss Meadowcourt has no pride with us poor folks, and shakes hands with us just as lief in her Sunday clothes as on week days. But she's not a lady to demean herself by going to church with such as us; at least, so I take it."

"Lord love your soul, you're a thousand years behind your time, all of you," Tat said explosively. "Don't you know that times are changing, and that poor folks are to have their turn at last? You hear what the parson says o' Sundays—'The poor shall be filled, and the rich sent empty away;' and though nobody believes it, parson least of all, the time is drawing nigh. Whether this,

that, or t'other, marries whomssoever, herssoever, or himsoever they pleases, matters no more to us than to the king of the Cannibal Islands; 'tis but the bringing together of two fools to torment each other. But, I tell you, we shall see something such as we never saw the like on, afore long. You eat your fat pork, and swallow your hard dum lin', and look as unconcerned as sucking babes. What will you say when you smell roasts all the year round, ay, and taste 'em too, and plum-pudding into the bargain? Well, that's what we poor folks are coming to. I don't read the penny papers for nothing, and don't go to Ipswich, and talk to the book-learned mechanic chaps for nothing. And I don't read the Scriptures for nothing either, and can expound a prophecy as well as most of the parsons. The rich have had their day; that's what the penny papers and the Scriptures and the night watchin's teach me. And we are to step in their shoes, and jolly fun it will be, to my thinking, to do nothing from morning till night but hover about a public-house jingling the money in one's breeches pockets, and treatin' old acquaintances to sixpennorth of the best. Now, when I hear of ladies like Miss Meadowcourt taking up with such as have no Sunday clothes, and not a farthing to bless themselves with, thinks I, things a e coming rounde and rounder, and soon they'll come round to us."

There was a silence of some minutes, during which many varied expressions passed over the broad faces of the assembly. Some grinned blankly, and nothing more. Others nudged each other, with sly winks of incredulity. The oldest and sagest looked terribly discomposed.

"Tat may talk as he may," said the ploughman who had before remonstrated. "I've read the Scriptures every Sabbath for the last forty year, and have never come across any passage promisin' plum-pudding's and roast beef to poor folks all the year round. Things may change, and the world may turn topsy turvy for all I know; but this I am pretty sartin about—as long as we live, and our childer's childer, there'll be them who eat nigh to bustin', and them who go hungry and dry. It's the Lord's will."

With that he rose and went.

The odour of soberness being withdrawn, an explosive burst of laughter filled the place. In spite of Tat's authority, both mental and physical, the scriptural roast beef and plum-pudding, the breeches' pocket full of money, and the rest of the things that he declared to

be coming "rounder and rounder," seemed sheer joking. A few coarse jests and homely, one might almost say brutal, sarcasms followed the laughter, after which pipes were smoked and pots emptied in silence. This sort of scene became an almost daily occurrence, and as upon each some fresh scandal was fabricated or some old one embellished, it may be imagined what a pretty story soon circulated about the little community at Pilgrim's Hatch. Madame Sylvestre was but one of Monsieur Sylvestre's numerous wives. Maddio did not carry in Madame Sylvestre's milk pails and wait upon her with such politeness for nothing. Oh, they were a bad lot! And was there not something diabolical in the artfulness with which they could draw money out of rich, good sort of people like Miss Meadowcourt? It was all very well to say that these heathenish foreigners had done good in the place. They had cured sick cows, it is true, and sick folks too; but what right had they to meddle and make with medicine, being neither doctors nor proper quacks? The evil one was in it all, without a doubt. Did not our fathers and grandfathers say that some day the Peasemarch wizard would appear again? And if he was not here now, he would never come at all, to their thinking.

Thus evil-tongued report went abroad, saying all kinds of evil things about three harmless folks, whose only crime had been a passionate craving after the good of their fellows. Far and near spread the rumour, till soon not a leal servitor remained among Monsieur Sylvestre's train of *protégés*.

And as the day of trial drew near, the wise shook their heads forebodingly, and the malicious made less decorous signs of evil portent.

Ingaretha was away, so was Mr. Carew; and, except these two, he had no staff upon which to lean. What would avail his smooth speeches and his honeyed voice now?

CHAPTER XXXIII.—THE RECTOR SPEAKS HIS MIND.

It was a mild February afternoon, and the rector of Culpho sat in his little study writing his Sunday's sermon—thrice blessed sermon, that sent half a hundred worn-out folks to sleep! Happy sleepers! happy magician! What would we not give, now that we have grown old and weary, to recall certain Sabbaths of our childhood, when we nestled cosily in the remotest corner of the old family pew, and drowsed and droned to the familiar tune of the weekly discourse! Those days are gone for ever. The pews are no

more. Perhaps, could we hear it now, the voice of the village priest might not exert its wonted sway on our senses. Yet the remembrance of that long sleep in the summer afternoons comes back, how lovingly, in the days when all pleasures are difficult, and sleep most of all!

The rector's study looked upon a pretty flower-bed full of crocuses and snowdrops, a cluster of bright green evergreens, and a strip of pale blue sky. Little birds still twittered under his window in search for a last crumb. A tame old hen struted across the gravel path. The rector's elderly mare might be seen grazing in the churchyard. Altogether it was a peaceful scene, suggestive of bachelor domesticities and tranquillity.

Mood Mr. Whitelock was not in a tranquil mood this morning. Ingaretha's absence had but strengthened the rector's passion, or what he was pleased to call passion; and the last spark of hope was being fanned into flame by many favouring circumstances. None could say what change might take place in her mind when once she was removed from evil and unpropitious influences. He knew well enough that his enemies and rivals were legion, but felt himself something like Hercules setting his foot upon the hydra's neck. Was not Mr. Carew far away? Was not René Rubelle in prison? Was not Monsieur Sylvestre in danger of prison also, and his wife and companions in disgrace? It seemed not unlikely that Ingaretha might, on returning home, find herself so lonely as to turn to him involuntarily for comfort and counsel. If she stayed away a little longer only, the mischief now brewing might have matured, and she would find herself in Culpho almost without a friend.

Just a little malice, therefore, as well as a good deal of love, quickened the rector's thoughts and entered into the composition of his sermon. It seemed to him no ill opportunity to take up the cudgels once again and do battle for orthodoxy and conservatism. If all was true that he heard, and he heard a great deal, high time it seemed that some stringent measures should be devised in order to preserve the village from divers heresies, both spiritual and social. These free-thinking friends of Ingaretha's did not do or think things by halves. They held that all the world should be educated; they believed that all the world would be saved; there were hardly limits to the audacity of their hopes and the latitude of their creeds.

And there was another point which the rector was thinking of while writing this sermon; namely, the license of speech that had lately crept into the village conclave concerning Ingaretha. If all was true that little birds whispered in his ear, unpardonable things were said of this lady, and saving himself, who was there to stand up and give them the lie? She had taken no pains to win friends and champions of her own rank; she had hitherto rebuffed his offers of love and protection. Would she not feel differently when made aware of the chasm yawning at her feet? He could but look forward to her misfortunes as his own best chance of happiness, and forbore to chide himself for the selfish thought, because of the happiness thereby insured to herself. The sound of carriage wheels caused him to start. It was a common hack carriage laden with trunks and portmanteaus, and Mr. Whitelock, who never entertained staying visitors, turned pale as the suspicion crossed his mind that some long-lost sight of poor cousin or unfortunate college friend had swooped down upon him for a few weeks. And a child's head peeped out of the window! He drew back aghast. What demon of mischief had sent these locusts to spoil his peace, and to prey upon him?

Shrinking back, he watched the approach of the strangers from behind the window curtain. But when the carriage stopped at the door, a lady stepped out, wrapped to the delicate chin in a wonderful travelling cloak of dark purple velvet bordered with white fur; tall, fair, rosy-cheeked, golden haired. Could this lady be but the one he was thinking about?

Of course it was Ingaretha, and in another moment they were shaking hands in the hall, and talking after the old friendly fashion. "Can my maid take little Bina to the fire somewhere?" asked Ingaretha. "I have many things to talk to you about, and was too impatient to go home first. We are all famished," she added with a smile and bewitchingly begging look.

The rector was both charmed and bewildered.

"Oh dear! what can I offer you? A glass of wine? A biscuit? A little bread and butter?"

He ran hither and thither with a bunch of keys in his hands, looking as distracted as if a dozen soldiers had been suddenly billeted upon him.

"Which did you say you would have?" he said suddenly sitting down again and pulling the bell violently.

"We are too hungry to mind what it is, so long as we get food," Ingaretha said, wickedly enjoying the rector's agitation.

"Suppose we say bread and butter then. Mary, bring in the bread and butter directly, and wine glasses. I will fetch up a bottle of sherry from the cellar. And, Mary, bring some water for the little girl."

After a good deal of bustle, the luncheon tray appeared, and the host did his best to acknowledge the grace and importance of his guest. But the host *nascitur, non fit*. It is

granted to the choicest souls only to embellish the daily board, whether homely or regal, with the aroma of true hospitality. Ingaretha could not help contrasting the clumsy courtesy of Mr. Whitelock with the exquisite grace of Monsieur Sylvestre. She had sat down to his table on the borders of the desert many a time, and though the fare consisted only of a loaf and a bunch of bananas, something, one knew not what, always lingered round the little feast like a perfume. Here the water was not turned into



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wine, the bread was not consecrated after the poet's fashion, all was bare prose and reality from beginning to end.

When the little girl had been sent away to play with the kitten, Ingaretha plunged at once into the business that had brought her to the rectory.

"This is sad news about Monsieur Sylvestre's summons before the magistrates. Who is at the bottom of such malicious mischief-making?" she said with eagerness.

Mr. Whitelock turned red, fidgeted in his chair, and at last made answer—

"My dear Miss Meadowcourt, any effort to put an end to the dissemination of sedi-

tious and blasphemous doctrine must be called righteous interference. Pray forgive me for speaking so plainly to you."

Ingaretha was silent. The rector thinking he had made an impression, went on:—

"You do not know what a pass things have come to in the village since you went away. Formerly, my people were contented, laborious, resigned to a lot of privation and poverty. The parish church was well attended, the Sunday school also; Christmas doles were thankfully received; minister and congregation worked harmoniously together. (How grievously is all this changed! Your reforms, undertaken

I cannot doubt with the most charitable motives, were the beginning of evil. The more you did, the greater was the discontent engendered. You gave the people good water, you built them commodious dwellings, founded village libraries, lavished money upon all kinds of means for their comfort,—and your *protégés*—”

“My friends,” put in Ingaretha.

“Your friends followed in your wake, and aggravated the evil a hundred fold. Where you gave an inch, they promised an ell. What you did in a temperate and well-intentioned spirit, they carried on with the zeal and fervour of propagandists. My flock desert my teaching on Sundays, rebel against my authority on week days. The whole neighbourhood is being gradually leavened with the leaven of discontent and heterodoxy by the beguiling tongue of Monsieur Sylvestre.”

The rector wiped the drops of perspiration from his brow and the tears of mingled excitement and anger from his eyes. He had let indignation get the better of him unawares. But sooner or later he must have told her the whole truth, and the sooner the better. Her query, though intentionally unoffending, had dropped like a hot coal into a heap of smouldering ashes. The deed was done, and she must bear the consequences.

“I am very sorry to hear this,” Ingaretha said sadly.

“But you do not know all yet,” the rector went on, gathering boldness from Ingaretha’s subdued look. “An unheard-of license of speech pollutes the daily discourse of these hitherto well-behaved rustics. Their hours of recreation are regaled with loose slanders, or abuse of their betters. Neither rank, nor age, nor sex are spared . . .”

“But surely Monsieur Sylvestre is not to be blamed here?” asked Ingaretha impatiently. “Of all men in the world he is the purest-hearted, the simplest-minded, the most charitably disposed. Oh! do not accuse him of teaching the people to slander and speak ill of others.”

The rector looked at her fixedly for a second or two, then rose, turned away his face, so that she might not be too much dismayed, and said:—

“Miss Meadowcourt, your blindness in this matter cruelly misleads you. It will be acting a friendly part to remove the veil from your eyes, and, however painful to me, I must speak out. A foul slander about yourself is circulating in the place, and the author of that slander is no other than Monsieur Sylvestre.”

Ingaretha turned pale.

“What do they say of me?” she asked, looking straight at the rector.

The downright, unflinching look of her blue eyes encouraged him to proceed.

“It is said,” he went on, “that you have so completely gone over to the so-called cause of the lower classes as to decide upon casting in your lot with theirs. In plain words, people marry you to a man of the people.”

“And what else?” Ingaretha added calmly, though a flush had mounted to her brow.

The rector stared at her aghast.

“You ask me what else?” he stammered.

“Is not this enough? Is not this filling the cup of insult to the brim? Think again, Miss Meadowcourt. What opinion must people have of you to dare to utter such a calumny? The bare thought of it takes my breath away,” and the poor rector gasped for breath.

“I do not know that names signify much,” he went on after a pause, feeling a little irritated at the lady’s composed silence, “but I can give you every particular if you choose.”

“There is no need,” Ingaretha answered.

“The evil report has reached you, then?”

She was silent. Quite incapable of divining her thoughts, he went on:—

“Is it not high time that steps should be taken to stamp out once and for all this contagion of ill? You seem unmoved, you say no word. You cannot be indifferent to the reports of those malevolent scandal-mongers?”

Ingaretha was still silent. The rector grew impatient.

“Your friends at least do not know how to control their indignation. That your goodness and friendliness to those beneath you should be thus rewarded rouses a vindictive spirit in the meekest. I for one cannot stand by quietly whilst your reputation is being damaged.”

Ingaretha looked on the carpet and said no word.

Stung by undemonstrativeness which looked like ingratitude, and at the same time buoyed up by a hope that the present occasion seemed to warrant, the rector added—

“Nothing that people could say to your discredit would alter my feeling for you, pray believe that. If I have spoken with zeal, it is because your good name is more precious to me than my own. Only say the word, give me the right to defend it, and the lie is disproved for ever.”

“And if it is no lie, but the simple truth, will you stand by me still?” asked Ingaretha with trembling lips and tears in her sweet eyes.

PART VIII.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—PARTING IN SORROW.



THE rector was stunned. Much as he had doubted his own power of reading Ingaretha's character, he never looked for such a surprise as this. She was, as he knew well, a creature of impulses; fresh as Eve, naive as Undine, brave as Rosalind

in the midst of nineteenth-century civilisation, she stood apart from all other women, not because of supreme gifts or anything that could be called genius, but for reason of a brave, direct spirit and a sweet and courageous temper out of keeping with the sphere in which her lot was cast.

This brave spirit and courageous temper the rector now more than ever called by the hard names of perversity and unfeminine decision. He had foretold much mischief that would arise therefrom, but of such a catastrophe as this how could he dream? Dismay, anger, contempt, alternately took possession of him. He could not give her his hand and a sorrowful blessing as Carew had done. He coldly debated in his own mind what words were best fitted to express his abhorrence of the step she contemplated.

At last it was Ingaretha who spoke.

"If you think my crime too great to be forgiven, at least do not accuse Monsieur Sylvestre of having led me into temptation," she said. "I assure you he is as innocent of this as yourself."

"That cannot be," answered the rector. "But for him, those companions of his would never have had the audacity to settle down here. He is at the bottom of all the troubles that afflict this unhappy place."

"I have tried to do good and not harm in the village," Ingaretha said with dignity,

"and under other circumstances I should not follow the same course. I trust that my marriage will be a blessing, not a curse, to those whose happiness I am bound to consider."

"You mean your neighbours, I presume?" asked the rector sarcastically.

She smiled a little sarcastically also.

"I mean my friends," she answered with emphasis.

"Friends!" cried the rector with a bitter smile. "You little know what you say or what you do. By the step that you contemplate, you will inevitably alienate your best friends. Think for a moment of the consequences of an unequal marriage in your case. By the goodness of God you were born to a position so exalted and enviable as to place you apart from most women; had you accepted these gifts in a meek and tractable spirit, had you thrown yourself into the arms of the Church, had you, as becometh the weaker vessel, trusted yourself entirely to the leadership of her ministers, you would not now have been thus led astray. A pillar of the Church, a prop and a stay to the State, the pride of your equals, and the oracle of your inferiors, what a career was before you had you been meek and godly-minded! Instead of choosing the better part like Mary, which would not be taken away from you, with Martha you were fain to be troubled about many things. And things that could not possibly do you good: Socialism—I can hardly bring myself to utter the hateful word—formed your daily reading instead of Scripture. Your Sabbaths were desecrated by ungodly music and secular singing. Your friends were chosen from among the upholders of republicanism and free thought, enemies of Church and State, inculcators of the hateful doctrine of equality. 'Evil communications corrupt good manners,' and you, no more than any other person, especially a woman, could escape contamination. Little by little, you suffered yourself to be ensnared in the wiles of evil doctrine, till, alas! no counsels could reach you, nor remonstrances touch you. I have done my best throughout the last few months, but you turned your back upon the lover, despised the friend, rejected the priest. I have now no word to add except—May God have pity upon you, and bring you to see the error of your ways!"



"I AM VERY SORRY," SHE SAID. "I HOPE YOU WILL FORGIVE ME BY-AND-BY."

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He did not offer her his hand, nor did he so much as incline his head towards her, but rose to go; then feeling the discourtesy of the act, sat down again, pale, sad, exhausted.

Ingaretha, seeing the hopelessness of the cause she had come to plead, was in no mood to pursue the conversation farther. That Mr. Whitelock should cruelly misjudge her was no surprise. That he could in his anger say hard things with a hard look was scarcely unexpected. But that he should deliberately sentence her thus, with no commendation to mercy, seemed a little too much. What had she done to deserve a punishment, evidently, in his eyes, the heaviest he could inflict? It was surely not her fault that she could not love and marry him. Was she not free to choose lovers as well as friends, opinions as well as duties?

She rose, and held out her hand with a candour that might have touched one more irate than the poor rector.

"I am very sorry," she said, standing before him with the sunshine on her cheeks and hair—as fair a thing as the world could show that bright spring day! "I hope you will forgive me by-and-by."

The rector brightened. Was light dawning upon the girl's dark soul? Had a heavenly blessing descended upon his words, making them strong to conquer?

"May you be more and more sorry!" he said, taking her hand and holding it for a minute in his own. "And sorry in time, Miss Meadowcourt; I, your sincerest friend, cannot wish you anything but this. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," Ingaretha said with a kindly smile. She could not feel rancour against her old friend when his eyes were moist and his voice unsteady.

Then he silently attended her to the carriage, and the man was ordered to drive home.

"What is the matter?" said Bina.

"Mr. Whitelock has been scolding me, that is all."

Bina opened her large eyes.

"I thought rich people were never scolded, whether naughty or no; and I am sure you are never naughty."

"In Mr. Whitelock's eyes I am very naughty," Ingaretha answered; adding, "and perhaps I have not been so good to him as I have been to you."

The child kissed her sleeve ecstatically.

"Oh, haven't you just been good to me! and to the children too! May I go home this

very afternoon? I want to see Sammie's face when he gets his fishing-rod, and Pennie's when she sees her doll's wax legs! Can the cab carry me home now? I'm not at all hungry."

Ingaretha kissed the child, and promised that the pony-carriage should take her to Peasemarch directly they reached the Abbey.

It was a dreary going home. Fires were burning all over the house, flowers were placed on her table, the pleasant rooms seemed to welcome their mistress: but not joyfully. It was a childish fancy, perhaps engendered by Mr. Whitelock's warnings, that before her, with mocking finger on its lips, stalked the ghost of her future life, saying, "Beware! beware!"

She wandered from room to room trying to chase away the unbidden spectre, and dream a golden dream. After all, what had she heard? Only the forebodings of a nature quite incapable of understanding her own ideal and the ideal of those with whom she had cast her lot. Nothing could make Mr. Whitelock's paradise, whether material or spiritual, her paradise; but in Monsieur Sylvestre's, in Maddio's, in René's she was content to dwell for ever. They might err; to what reformers is it given to build up as quickly and exactly as to pull down? In one respect they would never err. Whatever misfortunes might happen to them, whatever temptations assail or persecutions overtake, clear and bright as a flame would burn their feeling of brotherhood and passionate sympathy with humankind. From their high standard no traitors would entice, no fictions allure. Strong unto death, they would serve and defend their cause like the noble army of martyrs that had gone before.

It might be that sorrow was in store for her instead of happiness. She could not tell. But something in her heart said that she had chosen the right casket, and she believed the voice. Was it not a thousand times better to weep with those she loved than to rejoice with those to whom she was indifferent?

The golden dream did not come at her bidding, but it came after a time. The door of her prison opened—she knew not how—and like a bird escaped into the blue, her spirit soared, rejoicing. The world faded from her vision, bright clouds hovered overhead, strains of wonderful melody floated about, golden ether sucked her in. Hand in hand with Love, she saw herself wandering through the cycles of Time, crowned, transformed, immeasurably blest!

CHAPTER XXXV.—THE TRIAL.

MONSIEUR SYLVESTRE's trial happened to fall upon one of those unfriendly March days, in the embraces of which you feel as woe-begone and helpless as if hugged to the bosom of a polar bear. The wind howled, the sleet dripped, the naked trees bowed their heads with a look of human dreariness, the folded sheep limped about bleating piteously, the pigs shrieked in their styas, the wise barn-door fowls roosted all day long.

Monsieur Sylvestre had recovered his spirits long before the appointed day, and made his toilette cheerily. Ingaretha had presented him on his last birthday with a superb suit of winter clothes, consisting of coat and pantaloons of dark blue cloth, sealskin waistcoat, and ample cloak, fastened at the throat by a large silver clasp. His long white locks, never neglected, were brushed with more than ordinary care, his pocket-handkerchief was of fine white lawn, his gloves fitted to perfection, his boots had received an extra polish; his appearance was altogether elegant and distinguished. There was not one of the little family who had not assisted at this important toilette. Maddio brushed the boots, Aglaë adjusted the cravat, one of the brothers Carrington officiated as barber, the other as valet, Euphrosyne meekly brought to hand, brush, comb, and whatever else was needed.

Precisely at ten o'clock, Ingaretha's brougham drove up to the door, and Monsieur Sylvestre jumped in with a jaunty step, the others watching him much as children watch their favoured companion bound to ball or fair.

"Do not go without a word of farewell," Euphrosyne said. "How can we tell what may happen ere we meet again?"

"Away with thy affectionate importunities," he answered, arranging his cloak in artistic folds. "We are bound to no inquisitor's council or Vehmgericht. *Adieu, chers enfants!*"

He waved his hand gaily to the group, ordered the coachman to drive off, and leaning back on the cushions, made quite a triumphal entry into the town. One would have thought he was about to receive some royal investiture, or at least a lordly legacy, so nonchalant and self-satisfied was he.

Meantime the magistrates were hurrying to the town-hall, muffled to the throat, and wishing that people would not be so inconsiderate as to steal faggots, trap rabbits, and by other misdemeanours call comfort-

loving gentlemen from their firesides on such a morning. One by one they took their seats, and amid hand-rubbing, coughing, and other demonstrations to the severity of the weather, gossiped cheerfully, poked fun at each other, and otherwise beguiled the time. When business fairly began, there was comedy as well as serious matter on hand. Some out-and-out Radical had presumed to find fault with the magistrates, who had charged the board ten shillings a head for dinner when on a visit of inspection to the county asylum. Was ever such impudence? The items of the dinner were detailed amid mixed mirth and censure. Should not magistrates dice, forsooth, and at the expense of the county, when they generously gave their time for the public good? The irate gentlemen uttered strong invectives against the impudent republican spirit that must be stamped out, another recited iacetic scraps of poetry, a third, endeavouring to throw oil upon troubled waters, quoted Scripture, and there the matter ended.

Then the cases were hurried through; first one old man was convicted of having helped himself to some sticks from the squire's park-palings, then a boy of fourteen for having trapped a young rabbit, and so on;—the court getting more and more crowded as the time for hearing Monsieur Sylvestre's case drew on. Public curiosity was tickled at the thought of Miss Meadowcourt's *protégé* being taken up in the company of poachers and drunkards.

At last he appeared. Walking to the place assigned him, he confronted the magistrates, smiling and bowing augustly. By his side stood his accuser, Bob Sheldrake, Mr. Whitelock's clerk and sexton, wishing himself a hundred miles away.

Monsieur Sylvestre was accused of having preached so near Mr. Whitelock's church, and in so loud a voice, that the congregation were disturbed in their devotions. Two or three of Mr. Whitelock's most regular hearers supported him as witnesses. Sylvestre, the foreign gentleman, could be heard, and the clergyman could not, &c. All these answers were given with blushes and stammerings, Monsieur Sylvestre smiling contemptuously the while. At this stage of affairs, a buzz ran through the place. Ingaretha's name dropped from many lips. Mr. Stapleton stretched forward, blushing scarlet at the bare possibility of such a thing; one or two of his companions eyed each other with a shocked look; the crowd gaped, wonderstruck.

Of course it was Ingaretha. Gathering up the folds of her dark-blue riding habit, she made her way to the centre of the hall, with heightened colour and kindling eyes. That day she had put on nothing for grace and all for spite, saying to herself that she would be ugly as befitted the occasion. She had hidden her hair with a long black veil, had muffled up her throat with fur, and otherwise sought to disfigure herself. But how beautiful she looked despite these lendings! Monsieur Sylvestre nodded approval. The magistrates felt uncomfortable, the unhappy village clerk wished that the earth would straightway swallow him. Mr. Whitelock turned red and white, and gasped for breath; a change came over the spirit of the entire assembly.

Ingaretha was afterwards ashamed of herself for having spoken with so much childish impetuosity and so little self-possession. But when she found herself confronted with Mr. Stapleton and others of her father's old friends, and guessed what was passing in their minds, she found it a hard matter to speak at all. The amazement and displeasure of Mr. Pollard, Mr. Stapleton, and others of her neighbours might not in themselves be matter of concern, but it vexed her to think that they should regard her conduct in any but a generous light. Was she not after all simply trying to do the first duty that came to hand? The most difficult problem of life but resolved itself into this.

Having kissed the book somewhat gingerly, for a very dingy little book it was, she said what she had to say; her voice, always sweet and clear, trembled only once.

"Monsieur Sylvestre is one of my best friends, and I have attended his open-air preaching often. I have also attended Mr. Whitelock's church whilst the out-door preaching went on. I am sure the one did not interfere with the other; whoever says so grossly exaggerates. It is nonsense. It is even falsehood. Monsieur Sylvestre's preaching is not what might be called orthodox, it is unsectarian, but it is good and charitable, and devout. Whenever I was present nothing took place that could be called disturbance of the peace, or interference with the service of the parish church."

Then she withdrew. The magistrates put their heads together and whispered. Mr. Whitelock's face fell. He saw that Ingaretha's testimony had lost him his cause.

And so indeed it had. Monsieur Sylvestre was politely requested to hold his out-door preachings a little farther off the church next summer, and the case was dismissed forthwith.

Ingaretha rode home in a passion. 'Monsieur Sylvestre was as much elated as if he had won a stupendous victory. Ingaretha's common sense told her that such a victory was worse than defeat, since it would inevitably be followed by a series of petty persecutions. Monsieur Sylvestre saw nothing before him but triumph and exaltation.

To Mr. Whitelock the discomfiture was crushing. He went home and moodily shut himself up in his study for the rest of the day.

What could he do with it? His adversary had worsted him in drawn battle, and boasted of allies stronger than his own. Ingaretha, like most women, possessed the softness of the dove combined with the cunning of the serpent. He could not perceive in her a vestige of the meek and godlike spirit commended in the Scriptures as a woman's best adornment. She was polluted by contact with unbelievers, she was perverted by false doctrine, she was blinded by self-confidence. How could he save her soul and shield his own reputation? There were not wanting disaffected members of the Church on the alert to cry, 'Ichabod, Ichabod, thy glory is departed,' and here was indeed an occasion for them to exult over one of the discomfited of God's ministers.

He shed tears of mingled retrospection and forecast. The clouds that darkened his horizon showed no silver lining. Thwarted, defied, rivalled, he prefigured himself as going to the grave, an unwept and unhonoured martyr of the tottering Church.

It must not be supposed that amid all this burning indignation the rector suffered no pangs of self-questioning. He had hitherto been far too placid, too hardly moved, too easily won over. It behoved him to wage fierce war with the allies of evil sent hither to prove and torment him. Away then with mild persuasions and honeyed reproaches. On with the armour of the church militant, sword, and helmet, and breastplate. Avaunt, bewitching eyes, and rosy cheeks, and waving golden locks that had ensnared and betrayed him! Hail, rigid duty and puritanic simplicity, and ardent self-abnegation!

Thus the poor rector struggled with himself.

CHAPTER XXXVL.—EXCOMMUNICATED.

THE clerical tongue is not, as a rule, discreet, and Ingaretha's secret being known to the rector, the little birds flew east, and the little birds flew west, till it was soon known to all the world of St. Beowulf's Bury. Never

within living memory had such a scandal happened. That the lady of the manor, the first heiress of the county, the descendant of the noble De Meduecourts and Bannisters, should hold disreputable political and social views, and consort with the perverted representatives of Socialism, Democracy, and Free Thought, was bad enough. But that she should so far forget her duty to herself, her ancestors and society, as to marry a man of the people, a journalist moreover, and a vagabondish refugee to boot, passed all bounds of patience. The matrons forthwith held a solemn conclave, and sentence of excommunication was unanimously voted against the misguided girl. To this conclave, of course, no maidens were admitted, and they chattered apart like foolish little birds, about the fascinating, mysterious person whom Ingaretha had elected to marry.

"Would I were she!" cried one.

"Ah! do you remember his beautiful eyes?" said a second.

"And his voice! I would give all my trinkets to have that sweet voice flatter me!" a third whispered.

"Ingaretha is a thousand times better than we worldlings," a fourth said daringly, "who are sold by our mothers for our little beauty!"

Ingaretha's heretical teachings were spreading in spite of the resolves of the older and wiser folks. Youth will be ingenuous, and to these young girls Ingaretha's conduct seemed heroic. They had seen with their eyes and heard with their ears. This man might be poor, unfortunate, and of low birth. But who that was rich and prosperous and nobly bred among their brothers and lovers could be compared to him, not only for natural gifts, but for acquired graces? He was beautiful, fascinating, full of enthusiasm and courage. He only wanted the purple mantle and golden lute to be like the troubadour of song and story, who went from castle to castle, winning everywhere the guerdon of knightly praise and woman's love.

But to the modern mothers of unmarried daughters the poor troubadour with the purple mantle and golden lute was a pariah, and nothing more. He might make bright eyes weep and brave hearts beat faster with stirring melodies. What was that in comparison to the virtues of wearing unexceptional broad cloth, and inheriting a certain amount of acres or bank shares? Ingaretha in their eyes was lowering herself, as much as if she was about to elope with her groom or gamekeeper. Whereupon Amy Greenfield ventured, half dying with indignation, to say—

"Monsieur René may be poor, but he is an accomplished gentleman, I am sure; if not, who is? He speaks Italian and Spanish beautifully, and English pretty well. He can recite pages of Dante and Calderon; he can paint and sing, and play two or three musical instruments; he never uses any but elegant language, and he has the most astounding memory of books he has read and places he has seen. He never says a thing one does not wish to remember."

A storm broke over her head.

"What, you, a clergyman's wife and a mother, approve of such people! When did this paragon of yours make his appearance in the parish church? When did he or any of his four companions so far show a proper feeling as to lay aside pleasures on the Sabbath? Pray think twice before you declare yourself to be the champion of such a cause."

There was no need to think twice. Amy knew well enough that her children's bread depended upon her own and her husband's good behaviour, and though burning to speak, held her peace. She determined at any cost not to give up her friend. Her children must suffer want rather than Ingaretha's affections be so outraged.

By little and little Ingaretha realised the bitterness of her position.

She was doomed to be an outcast, a scapegoat, a pariah among the people who had known her as a little child. Patrician and proletaire, wealthy and straitened, mighty and insignificant, alike viewed her resolve with suspicion and contempt. By common consent she was to be placed outside the pale of society, and there kept for ever. Even her father's old friend, Mr. Stapleton, came to her, and with tears in his eyes confessed that henceforth he must come alone, since his wife and daughters decided it must be so. What her guardian and legal adviser said may be easily imagined. He also shed a few bitter tears when he found that persuasions and forebodings could do no good. Cold little notes of farewell came from those ladies who had hitherto figured as something more than mere acquaintances. Mrs. Pollard, for instance, and Lady Virginia Pennington, and one or two others, who felt, by reason of superior years, that they were at liberty to add counsel to castigation.

Like the shadow of an olive grove to some weary eastern wanderer came the following letter from Mr. Carew:—

"DEAR FRIEND AND FELLOW-TRAVELLER IN THIS HAPPY PLACE" (he wrote

from Florence),—"I cannot let the spring go by without a word. The skies, the sunshine, the violets, make me their messenger to greet you. Take theirs and mine together, and I will not ask which is the most welcome.

"The winter has gone—I know not how, but it is gone, thank Heaven—dead and buried beneath the snow: may flowers grow over its grave! Will not some one send me a word to say that you are well and happy, and not wholly forgetful of old friends?

"This exquisite land sweetens one's temper and inclines one to be better than one's will. In England—soon after parting from you—I tore into a thousand fragments the little Christmas poem that was to have made us all merry masqueraders under your hospitable roof. But half for your sweet sake, and half for sweet Italy's, I have forgiven fortune for her churlishness to me, and rewritten what I had begun for you.

"May I send you the poem as a wedding gift? I have nothing better to give, though I would fain have my best gift better still. Greet Monsieur Sylvestre and Madame and Maddio affectionately for me. Having you for their friend, I fear they need no poor offices of mine, though—as you know well—it would make me happy to serve them. Alas, I fear I must not offer to serve you!

"Farewell! Think of me as of one whose best happiness it is to have been unhappy for your sake. Your leal servitor,

"CAREW."

Ingaretha sitting solitary in her home answered her poet's letter thus:—

"I am almost too sorrowful to thank you for a word of kindness that reached me in the midst of loneliness and dismay. Because I am bent upon following a different path from that of my neighbours—wisely I cannot say, but honestly, God knows—they have leagued together to persecute me. But I will not be crushed. What right have they to be my judges? Your friend is no longer what you remember her, but fierce, and angry, and vindictive. God help me, if it were not for him in prison, and for those few friends I know that I can count on, I should hardly have the courage to write you now, but would rather give up all and die. . . ."

Tears fell on the page, and she took it up in her hands, thinking it would be better to send no letter at all than so sad a one as this. But he was a poet, and loved her with an abiding love. She had affronted him a thousand times, and he had always remained her

friend—the need of sympathy was too great to be withstood.

After a time the letter was proceeded with:—

"Do not think I am always in this mood. I did not dream there was anything worth weeping about till your kind letter came. Now I have determined to dry my eyes and do what I have to do bravely.

"Let me have your poem, dear friend. I shall never be too joyful or too unhappy not to read every word of it. God bless you! Good-bye.

"INGARETHA."

She did not like to write to him fully of all her troubles—Monsieur Sylvestre's trial, the gross behaviour of the village, the rector's hardness towards herself, and the rest. Why should he have the burden of her sorrows and none of her joys? Nor did she say, "Come to us when the corn is ripe, and bring your poem with you," though it was in her heart to do so. "Poor Carew," she said and sighed, "poor René, and lastly, poor Ingaretha!"

Could her persecutors have seen her then, doubtless a very comfortable assurance of providential retribution in store for this stray sheep would have filled their minds. Ingaretha was a brave woman, ready to walk through fire for the friends she loved and the truths she held sacred; in the primitive Christian period she would have been a martyr; in revolutionary times, a victim; in the nineteenth century—a transitory period from aristocratic principle to radicalism—she was neither wholly a martyr nor a victim, but shared in some measure the ill-fortunes of both. Without husband, father, or brother to stand by her in this hour of need, who can wonder that at times her courage flagged and her spirits drooped?

But she had put her hand to the plough, and would not look back.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—LOVER AND FRIEND.

Two or three weeks slipped by—they seemed months to Ingaretha—and one morning she woke to find it was spring. Like some beauty whose festive toilette had been delayed by undue sleep, Nature had aroused herself on a sudden. Lo, as if by magic, the floors of earth were covered with flowery carpets, the woodland orchestra resounded, gentle showers watered the tender green leaves, the sun shone warm but capricious, little rivers escaped from prison purled along the meadows!

Ingaretha's young heart could not with-

stand this gaiety and fulness of life. She put aside the sombre clothes of winter gladly, and donned a blue, wild-hyacinth coloured dress, smiling to think how beautiful she would have been in poor René's eyes. Her hair—the golden hair praised by poets ever needs sunshine!—looked twice as lustrous and twice as lovely as in winter-time; her cheeks glowed with the thankfulness of youth, her heart beat quicker than it had done for days—and all because spring had come.

This first spring day brought a surprise. Returning from a long walk in the park, she saw the tall figure of a man on the lawn, who hastened towards her with joyful cry and outstretched hands.

Of course it was no other than Mr. Carew. He had arrived that very morning from Rome, and, without waiting to change his travelling dress, hastened to pay his respects to the lady of the Abbey. His face beamed with the delight of seeing her again, though he could not fail to note how agitated she looked, how touched, how grateful.

It was in his heart to say, "I could not stay away, knowing you to be in trouble," but he checked the too friendly speech, and greeted her after a more distant fashion.

"What a welcome home is such a day as this!" he said. "I can't tell you how thankful I feel to be in England again."

He saw that her eyes were filling, and her lips trying vainly to frame an answer, and went on lightly:—

"Yet I never found Italy so beautiful before. Perhaps it was because you were not there, and Nature tried to console me. But I was not consoled, as you see, and I have come back determined to do the best I can with my life here."

Chivalrous truths, like the hero of the Odyssey, will not bear ignoble disguises, and throwing off their rags, are transformed from beggar to prince in a twinkling. Carew lacked courage to dress his generous thought in princely robes, but the transparent lendings dropped without warning.

Ingaretha held out one hand to him, whilst with the other she hid the tears she could not stay. He led her gently to a seat in the winter garden. They sat down side by side without a word. His calmness, his quiet solicitude, his unspoken tenderness, reassured her. She also grew calm, and began speaking as to an old friend.

"I suppose I ought not to be surprised at the outcry raised against me," she said, "but I did not realise what an important person I was before." This was said with a bitter

smile. "I am not cutting myself off from home interests and home duties. Nothing could make me do that. You know René as well as I do—how large-hearted and self-denying he is: can you believe that he would wish me to sacrifice these things for his sake?"

She turned to him with a look of eager appeal, which he met frankly and cheerfully.

"No," he answered; "I never knew a man whose character was so out of keeping with the spirit of the age. I for one have reason to thank René and all like him, who live for something else besides the gross satisfactions of the hour."

It was a generous speech, and she would fain have thanked him for it, but knew not how. Never looking at her but with the look of exaltation in his eyes that testified to her presence always, he went on:—

"I will be candid with you, and say for once and for all that I do not approve of his ideals—nor of the ideals of his teacher, Monsieur Sylvestre. It seems to me that all reformers of their school lose sight of the elementary truth taught alike by nature, by art, and by poetry, that is, the necessity of repose to great action. Granted that we are on the eve of a stupendous social revolution—and I am not sure that I here differ from them—who most further what is righteous in this or any other revolution, think you? Those who bestir themselves to uproot old institutions, or those who in the solitude of their chambers devise and perfect the plan of the new? The last without a doubt. And iconoclasts there must be, and demagogues there must be, and red republicans, and social experimenters. But is it not the better part to think instead of to work? to create instead of to destroy? to send out winged thoughts, rather than to ply spade and sledge-hammer in the service of the world-menders? At the risk of seeming discourteous to those you love best in the world, I say, Yes, and again, yes."

Ingaretha was silent for a minute or two, then answered slowly and thoughtfully:—

"I do not think I agree with you any more now than I did when we talked of the same subject in the corn-fields last summer." She blushed and went on—"Surely it has been practice and not theory, the following after truth, and not the framing of ideals, that has done most to make the world happier and better? Is not all reform, whether moral or material, the fulfilment of truth—loving lives, rather than the expression of truth-seeking minds?"

Carew answered with an animated look—

"Mistrust idealists as you may, but grant them thus much—they keep alive the torch of truth when all else is darkness; and by the light of that torch, the strong as well as the weak are guided on their way. I am sure that so far we are both agreed."

"Perhaps," she answered; "though even that light dies out sometimes. I have sadly lost my way of late."

"Nay, then," he said, his eyes moistening and his lips quivering as he glanced at her sweet face, "let me, in default of a better guide, help you to find it. I know well enough what troubles you. Do you think I have lived for thirty-eight years without understanding the character of my neighbours,—the narrowness of some, their dogmatism, their self-indulgence? To my cost, I know it but too well. Perhaps there was never so unpopular a person as myself in this part of the world, and why? Simply because I am no fox-hunting country squire, after the old pattern, but a lover of art and literature, a writer of verses moreover—the iniquity of the wildest socialist dreamer can go no farther than this—and an indifferentist in politics. I looked into the matter somewhat deeply, and discovered not sufficient grounds for self-abasement, but ample argument for self-justification in this very unpopularity. In what did I sin? In selfishly appropriating to myself the social supremacy which the largest landed proprietor might fairly claim? By no means. In niggardly refusing to lay out money upon any improvements necessary for the people? Not at all. My only crime was that I persistently followed my own ideas in the conduct of life. I valued art, and I was indifferent to social economy and politics. I threw myself heart and soul into the first, and eschewed the last. Are you not affronting the same vulgar prejudices, the same egotism, the same littleness, simply by an honest adherence to natural feeling? Let us comfort ourselves with the reflection that we could not serve our friends and neighbours better than by doing the very thing they hold in abhorrence."

She smiled doubtfully.

"My case is different from yours. It may be childish, but I cannot help feeling that there is some cause for the hue and cry raised against me. I can hardly believe so badly of the world as to consider myself a martyr."

"Only have patience, dear friend," he said, "and you will see things in a wholly different light. It is quite possible to offend all the

powers that be, and yet live worthily and happily, blessed by the gods. I, for one, am your leal knight and servitor and champion, prepared to lay down this poor life any day for my liege lady's sake."

He said this lightly, though in a voice that trembled with emotion, and taking up the fringe of her scarf, kissed it, as if thereby sealing the words. She answered with a blush:—

"I tremble for Monsieur Sylvestre, Euphrosyne, and Maddio. They have showed nothing but kindness to the poor people, and are yet looked upon as their enemies. Madame Sylvestre was almost broken-hearted the other day because their labourer's wife refused to let her sit up with a sick child. Formerly her services were accepted thankfully."

Carew inclined his head significantly in the direction of the rectory, and Ingaretha understood the gesture.

"Of course the village takes its cue from the clergyman," she said, "and Mr. Whitelock is my declared and bitter antagonist. He goes from house to house preaching a crusade against us all. How can we conciliate him?"

"Why should he be conciliated?" asked Carew, who had his own private grudge against the rector. "Let time do that, and leave him to the devices of his own understanding."

"And the others? Nobody comes to see me. If I meet old acquaintances in the streets, they bow coldly and pass on. I am no longer invited to go to their houses. These are but trifles, yet they gail."

Carew shrugged his shoulders.

"What else is to be expected?" he said. "You cannot gather figs of thistles, or grapes of thorns. Ignore their existence."

"But think of the harm they can do our poor friends!"

Again Carew made a gesture of impatience.

"You are too imaginative," he answered. "With the best intentions of doing mischief in the world, I cannot conceive any further harm happening to the Sylvestres through the agency of these people. Monsieur Sylvestre can have nothing to fear so long as he minds his own affairs."

"You have influence with Mr. Whitelock," Ingaretha began hesitatingly. "Perhaps you will be able to reason with him."

"You forget that he is a theologian," Carew said, rising; "but rest assured I will do all I can to bring him to reason." He held out his hand, said good-bye, and had turned to go, when he stopped suddenly.

"Be happy!" he said, falteringly, and that was all.

Then he walked away quickly, and never once looked back. Ingaretha went indoors, feeling more cheerful than she had done for days. She smiled to herself at the impetuosity, half childish, half angelic, of poets. Carew, the dreamer, the enthusiast, the devotee of art, was taking upon himself to do battle with the world and the flesh like the most matter-of-fact person in the world; and all for her sake.

For her sake! His chivalrous devotion made her both glad and sorry.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—A HAPPY THOUGHT.

A HAPPY thought came to Carew as he walked home that spring morning. The first thing he did on crossing his own threshold was to sit down and write the following letter:—

"MY DEAR GHENILDA,—When we parted in Florence last month, you said that nothing should induce you to spend the next few months in London, and that till Micheldever comes back from his Japanese mission, you did not know what to do with yourself. Will you come here?—of course bringing little



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Micheldever and the baby, and whatever belongings you like. There is plenty of room for all.

"I did not ask you before, in the first place because I had no idea of staying at home for more than a few weeks; and in the second, because I could not possibly foresee what would happen here, making your presence so very desirable, that I have hardly patience to send this letter by post, longing for the swiftest carrier-pigeon in the world. I believe you are fond of attending Women's Rights meetings, and I see your name down

in the *Times* (whenever I take it up, which is seldom, for I hate newspapers!) for twenty pounds to one society for promoting female knowledge, fifty pounds to another for securing women's franchise, a hundred, once in a way, to some university or other for ladies, &c., &c. You like to talk about missions, and would, I believe, enter an apothecary's shop as apprentice, if Micheldever had no objection. But I don't want to tease you and make you cross. I want you to come and fulfil a mission here.

"I write on behalf of that beautiful and

sweet young lady, Ingaretha Meadowcourt, my neighbour, and our fellow-traveller in former days. You cannot have forgotten her, though I know that women who live in the world have short memories; or, if you have forgotten herself, her hair must have stayed in your memory—softer than the finest silk, brighter than the purest gold, a never-to-be-forgotten splendour for all beholders! But I will not make a fool of myself—she is going to marry another man.

“Ingaretha feels that she, too, has a mission, and that mission is no other than to marry a social reformer, and throw herself, heart and soul, into a cause which, I believe, you have not yet espoused, namely, the cause of the working-classes, and, naturally, she does this to the chaotic, unimaginable horror of the good, stupid, twaddle-loving people here.

“Well, does your woman’s imagination carry you on to the end? Of course, and I am answered thus:—‘Dear brother, I will fly to Wilbye Hall, and stand by your friend Ingaretha.’ Kiss the children.

“Your always affectionate
“CAREW.”

This letter, addressed to Lady Micheldever, Florence, was despatched in time for the early London mail from St. Beowulf’s, Carew watching the messenger fairly off, with an elated look.

Then he ate, drank, changed his travelling clothes, opened letters, looked over bills, and signed cheques; lastly, unpacked his Italian *souvenirs* and note-books rather sadly.

In what a different frame of mind he had gone through the same tasks last year! Then there was still a little hope for him; now he could not hope any more. He remembered well with how much satisfaction he awoke, to find himself in Ingaretha’s England; how beautiful everything looked—sky, and tree, and flower; how he seemed to move in golden ether; how Hope danced ever before him, wearing Ingaretha’s smile, mocking Ingaretha’s voice—and now? It seemed too cruel!

He covered his face with his hands, and for a few moments sobbed aloud. It was good to serve her and share misfortune with her; but it was not good, having done all this, to be severed from her as long as life should last. His unselfishness could not go so far as that. He might stand by her and by her lover in the teeth of the world. He should never be resigned to the supreme renunciation implied in such conduct—never, never, never!

He dashed away the bitter tears, and bestirred himself in the work he had undertaken. To prepare for the arrival of his half-sister Ghenilda, was to prepare mortification for Ingaretha’s persecutors, and the protection of an amiable and spirited woman for herself. The wife of a peer, and of an ambassador, Ghenilda might well carry a high hand among the small gentlefolks of the place. He knew exactly how matters would turn out. Ghenilda, a spoiled child—three years ago the beauty of the season—a woman of the world withal, had a touch of childishness, *naïveté*, call it what you will, in her nature that prompted her to do wicked and even spiteful things. She would look upon it as an excellent joke to settle down at Wilbye Hall, and lead the small great folks an uneasy life of it. And she was not so conventional as to object to taking the world by surprise once in a while. An affectionate wife, a devoted mother, can do no wrong, urged Ghenilda, and feeling herself above suspicion, she often did things that, if not wrong in the world’s eyes, had just a spice of impropriety in them. Was it not unbecoming to attend Women’s Rights meetings, for instance? To give money to Women’s Rights societies? To put her name down as an advocate of such and such a Radical Woman’s movement? Of course; and grave duennas and prim matrons shook their heads, auguring evil consequences therefrom, Ghenilda caring not a straw. Her husband was easy-tempered, and as his temper concerned her a great deal and that of her neighbours very little, she pleased herself in most things.

That very day Carew called upon Mr. Whitelock; and after an interchange of civilities, said, with apparent carelessness—

“I expect my sister in a few days, to stay here till the end of the summer.”

“Indeed! I shall take an early opportunity of paying Lady Micheldever my respects. It will be a great pleasure to see her again.”

“She wouldn’t have come to such a dull place just now, I dare say,” Carew answered, with almost brutal frankness, “but that she can make herself useful. The way in which people treat Miss Meadowcourt, on account of her engagement, is abominable, and Ghenilda will come chiefly on her account. They are old friends, as you know.”

“True, I might have thought of that,” answered the rector, looking too much agast to think of anything. “How dull of me!”

"I hope you intend to take up the cudgels on behalf of your parishioner," Carew went on, forgetting his own bitterness in whimsical enjoyment of his rival's discomfiture. "My sister, as a woman, can do much; but you, as a clergyman, more. Such a narrow, persecuting spirit ought to be preached down."

The rector fidgeted in his chair, rose, walked to the window, and sat down again. He must hold his own, he must hold his own, he repeated to himself.

"You cannot mean to say that you approve of Miss Meadowcourt's choice?" he asked, putting on a judicial expression.

"Miss Meadowcourt has an entire right to please herself. Is she out of her senses or no? Let the physicians declare her mad, and shut her up in a lunatic asylum; or let her be considered as a rational being, and treated accordingly."

"I quite agree with you."

"Then, for God's sake, act up to your opinions like a man!" said Carew, starting from his chair, and grasping the rector's hand. "Now, if ever, is the time for you to take the lead in public opinion. Miss Meadowcourt can no more be indifferent to the petty animosities and carping spirit of a whole neighbourhood than any other sensitive woman. You have influence with some of these people. Make them see their conduct in its own detestable light."

"I cannot take the lead in public opinion against my conscience," the rector said, shrinking back. "I agree with you that Miss Meadowcourt should be treated according to such opinion as we are able to give of her sanity; and though I cannot believe that her reason is gone, it has been so terribly led astray by evil counsellors and influences that she is daily forfeiting her right to consideration alike as a member of the Church, a laywoman, and a lady. I have not concealed these sentiments from Miss Meadowcourt herself, feeling that, at the risk of alienating her friendship, I ought as a clergyman to warn her against her besetting sins, which are perversity, contempt of authority, and leaning towards lax theological doctrine. But I spoke in vain. My dear sir, I trust I do not speak in vain to you."

Carew got up and made for the door.

"You have not," he said coldly. "I now know exactly what Miss Meadowcourt must expect from her friends. I have no time to say any more. Good day."

"Stay a moment, I beg of you," the rector cried. "You misunderstand me if you think that I intend to turn my back upon her at such

a time. All my former remonstrances were made in a truly Christian spirit, and from time to time it will be my duty—and painful pleasure too—to renew them. It would indeed be cruel to leave her as a sheep having no shepherd. And who knows but that she may learn ere long to distinguish real well-wishers from flatterers and parasites, and thus be brought to see the error of her ways?"

"I am sure Miss Meadowcourt will never forsake her old friends at Pilgrim's Hatch, if that is what you mean," Carew answered, still curt and uncivil. "I am sorry you have such a mean opinion of them and of her. Good day."

"Nay, one word more," cried the rector, growing excited. "I cannot let you go entertaining these uncharitable thoughts of me. Do not suppose I have been brought to treat Miss Meadowcourt harshly without much inward struggle and the severest self-examination. I have taken the matter into my closet, and there scrutinized it in a humble and patient spirit. I know I am right in the course I pursue with regard to her."

"May it end prosperously!" Carew said with a bitter smile. "But now I really must go."

And for the third time that day he said "Good day." The parson and squire had never before parted without the accustomed shaking of hands.

Carew went home boiling over with indignation. It was not his habit to exercise a nice ethical discrimination in matters, however nearly affecting him; but their æsthetic relations he never for an instant lost sight of. He grieved deeply for Ingaretha's resolve, not because he saw any moral perversion in it, but because his taste was shocked, and he recognised in this instinctive repugnance of feeling a higher law than any other by which his conduct was guided. That Ingaretha's life and aspirations would ever be anything but noble he did not doubt for a moment. Why then should her expression of both receive spontaneous and as yet unwarranted disapproval by those who had no canons of taste, but judged every action according to an accepted standard of right and wrong? He comforted himself with the thought that, after all, men like Mr. Whitelock have very short-lived influence, and that people who suffered themselves to be led by him must be twice as narrow and twice as indiscriminating as himself.

The rector retired to his study more perturbed in spirit than ever. It was bad enough

to quarrel with Miss Meadowcourt, it was worse still to quarrel with Mr. Carew; yet he must hold his own, he must hold his own. He kept repeating this self-imposed charge like a child who fears he shall forget his well-learned lesson before the time for rehearsal arrives. What would become of his pastoral authority, indeed, if he suffered himself to be overridden by such men as Mr. Carew, a pleasant neighbour certainly, and a liberal contributor towards parochial expenses, but

an idler, a dabbler in literature, and, above all, the very laxest of churchmen?

The good rector, to use a phrase addressed by Wellington to one of his officers, had been educated beyond his intelligence. He was no more fitted to sit in authority over his fellow-creatures than the most insignificant of his parishioners; yet because he had entered the Church, he felt called upon to catechise his flock in season and out of season. With what evil results may be foreseen.



PART IX.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—GHENILDA'S REIGN.



THE first morning in April saw Carew's bachelor quarters changed as if by magic. So complete was the domestic invasion to which he had subjected himself, that not a corner of the house could now be called his own.

At first it had seemed as if room could not possibly be found to accommodate such an important personage as the two-year-old lord and his retinue, but after innumerable battles between Carew's housekeeper and his lordship's nurses and nursery-maids, the matter was settled. Poor Carew begged that everything else might be left to take care of itself, so long as the children (for he acknowledged the existence of the little girl also) had what they wanted, and put up with all kinds of inconveniences serenely. As for Ghenilda, she would not have minded sleeping in carpetless rooms, eating off earthenware, foregoing lace on her pillows, and submitting to other hardships, but she had very exalted ideas of what was necessary for the well-being of her boy. His baby sister was a pretty plaything, and would be sure to turn out good and insignificant, but her brother was already somebody of consideration, and what would he not be in a few years? By every mail long letters went to Japan, filled with details of little Micheldever's sayings and doings. Nothing that he said or did could be unimportant, his mother thought. "When our boy is a man, what a happy woman I shall be!" she wrote to her husband, feeling quite happy then! The first morning after her arrival, she took possession of the library, begged Carew to give up all notion of writing poetry, or otherwise employing himself during

her stay, and then having seated herself before the fire, poured forth a volley of questions:—

"What is this man like whom Ingaretha means to marry? When will the wedding take place? Where will they live? I am dying with impatience to know all about it."

"I must take one question at a time," answered Carew, never looking up from his desk. He was carefully going through his Italian sketches, pencil in hand. "What did you first want to know, my dear?"

"Is the man Ingaretha means to marry handsome?"

"Beautiful. Just that and nothing more."

"Oh!" cried Ghenilda, growing very animated. "Then, of course, she is very much in love with him?"

"Of course."

"I should like to be exactly in her position," Ghenilda said, adding, with a blush of compunction, "if it were not for the boy."

"My dear child, you were in love with Micheldever three or four years ago. Is not once enough?"

"But our love-making was a very prosaic affair! Could anything have been more prosaic? I have never had a touch of romance in my life, never."

And the happy little lady sighed.

"Don't envy poor Miss Meadowcourt," Carew said; "I fear she will not be very happy."

"Why should she be unhappy? There are plenty of things women value a thousand times more than jewels and fine clothes. If it were not for my boy, I would just as soon be poor as rich. I am sure the happiest people in the world are those who live in semi-detached villas upon three hundred a year."

"Who put that notion into your head?" Carew asked, smiling.

"No one. I have reasoned it out for myself. We have everything in such lumps that one gets sick of it, — too many indolent, flattering servants; too much travelling, too much eating, too much running about in London, too much staying at home in the country. But tell me why is Ingaretha sure to be unhappy? I am sorry she did not marry you, Carew."

"And I am sorry too."

Then he told her as much as he knew of René. Ghenilda was enchanted. She had

never before heard so romantic a story. She felt sure Ingaretha would be happy. She would do her utmost to make things easy and pleasant to her. After all, Ingaretha lived out of the world—there was no world at St. Beowulf's Bury—and any marriage she might make in no degree affected society in general. This was consolatory. Carew let his sister chatter till she was tired, and then suggested that it might be as well to say all this over again to Ingaretha, adding—

"For I leave her in your hands entirely now, and you must be like a sister to her."

"Unlike a sister, you mean," Ghenilda answered. "Almost all the sisters I have ever known detested each other."

"Be an angel then."

"Poor Carew!" Ghenilda said caressingly. "How good and unselfish you are in this wicked and selfish world!"

Carew made his escape, and after a long consultation held by Ghenilda with nursery authorities, it was settled that the little boy might safely venture as far as the abbey, and of course nothing could be more important than the dress and good locks of that small potentate, and though infinite pains were bestowed on his toilette, the admiring mother was by no means satisfied that he looked his best. "I am half sorry I did not let him wear his violet tunic after all," she said on the way. "This dress makes him look too much of a baby."

Ingaretha was in the terrace when the carriage drove up, and Ghenilda for a moment forgot the violet tunic, so lost was she in admiration of the queenly creature who advanced to welcome her.

Ingaretha had a grand maternal way with children that fascinated them more than all the chirping and cooing in the world. She bent forward and without hesitation took the boy in her strong arms, who never questioned her right to do so, falling in love with her at once. She kissed him, smiled at him, and bore him stately into the dining-room, where luncheon was ready.

"Oh, if I were but tall and strong, and golden-haired like her," thought Ghenilda, grown suddenly out of patience with her own *mignonne* beauty. "She carries the boy as if he were a feather, and at six-and-twenty has a complexion as fresh as his! I do envy Ingaretha her health, her stature, her strength, most of all, her hair."

Ingaretha was drawing a comparison in her own mind just then, but of a very different kind. Here was a happy wife, a proud mother, a good, true, simple woman, whose life

had been no problem, but so plain from the beginning that all who ran could read. Her ideals, her duties, her sympathies, might be circumscribed, but they were substantial and fixed. The hell of doubt, the forlorn struggles in the dark, the blind striving after the highest guidance, which were her own portion, Ghenilda would never know, and how God-sent, how enviable, seemed such ignorance!

When the child was gone, Ghenilda went up to her friend, and threw her arms about her with school-girlish effusion.

"My poor, ill-used child," she said, "how can we be good enough to you?"

"I don't complain of being ill-used, but ill-judged," Ingaretha answered. "I feel sure, if once the people who set themselves as judges over me would take the trouble to ascertain my real motives, they would think differently. It is inconsequence, not harshness, I complain of."

"What can you expect?" Ghenilda said consolingly. "Two-thirds of one's friends and neighbours are geese, as far as I can discover."

"And it is not pleasant to have the whole flock at one's heels, hissing and screeching," Ingaretha said.

"I suppose not. But, for my own part, I would rather be on unpleasant terms with stupid people. I would indeed."

"You forget that I want to help them. When I speak of friends and neighbours, I include those whom I am in duty bound to look after—I mean the poor."

Ghenilda made a pretty little gesture of dismay.

"Have you come to that? I thought that goodness to the poor was what we all take to when we are old women, by way of doing penance for our sins."

"By being good to the poor I don't mean giving away coats and flannel petticoats," Ingaretha said impatiently; "but something quite different. I hate playing the Lady Bountiful. I hate the subservience that so-called charity implies. Why should we not help the poor as we help each other? that is to say, by living in sympathy with them, and by holding before them the highest ideals we can attain to?" With increased spirit she added: "Charity—I use the word in its material and vulgar sense—has had a fair trial in the world, and what has it done?—I want sympathy to have its turn."

"Oh dear!" Ghenilda said, suppressing a yawn. "What a dreadfully serious world we live in nowadays! Last year I heard of nothing in London but Repression of Men-

dicants and Rights of Labour, Rights of Labour and Repression of Mendicants, from morning till night. But I can't feel interested in the working classes. I can't indeed, Ingaretha. Harry says the time is coming when lords and ladies will have to black their own boots and cook their own dinner. I should go without, though I wouldn't mind making the boy's pudding. But I think it is a comfortable world. Why disturb it?"

Ingaretha smiled and was silent. Ghenilda suddenly dropped on her knees before her, took her hand, and said coaxingly—

"I am dying to see a portrait of somebody. May I?"

"I have only a crayon sketch Mr. Carew made in Italy five years ago—not quite good, but very clever. You shall see that."

She fetched the portrait, a slight, suggestive, highly poetic sketch of her *protégé* at the age of twenty-two, and placed it, sighing, in Ghenilda's hand. The two looked at it together. Features, expression, proportion, were superlatively beautiful.

Ghenilda looked long and said nothing. What was there to say? But her eyes softened, and a sweet serious expression stole over her face as she silently contemplated the picture. Ingaretha, understanding the look and the silence, kissed her on the brow.

As might be expected, this little incident paved the way for a confidential talk, which lasted till Ghenilda suddenly started up aghast.

"Oh!" she cried self-reproachfully, "how naughty I am! What will nurse say at keeping Harry out so late? Dear Ingaretha, let me go at once."

CHAPTER XL.—INGARETHA AS INQUISITOR.

ALL this time Euphrosyne was distracted by an inward conflict. Aglaë's position at Pilgrim's Hatch was becoming daily more and more anomalous. She might at any time be discovered and recalled by her abandoned husband, or she might remain indefinitely under their roof, increasing the difficulties of her new friends a hundredfold. If they betrayed her secret, they were guilty of treachery; if they kept it, of fraud. There was certainly no sin to be laid at the door of the husband that could warrant such conduct on the wife's part. Nevertheless, she seemed to drift farther and farther from the world she had left behind, without any apparent consciousness of thereby incurring moral responsibility.

"I know that I am wicked," she would say when tenderly upbraided by Euphrosyne,

"but my mother is alone to blame for having given me such bad instincts. I am not of myself a perverted creature. It is impossible for women to be good who are born of bad mothers."

Such speeches would make Euphrosyne shiver and turn pale to the lips, but she did not cease her remonstrances. She had a twofold reason for persuading the young wife to return home and seek reconciliation—firstly, because she held it to be her duty; and secondly, because she foresaw danger if she stayed.

This free and easy life of theirs was childishly simple and pure, but not without temptations to a dissatisfied and inexperienced nature like that of Aglaë. She was ever on the alert for more sympathy and more affection than the circumstances could warrant, and never tired of pouring out her troubles to Maddio and the brothers Carrington. They were brought together both in the hours of toil and recreation. Passionately fond of music, dancing, and any other amusement, she sang, danced, and played in their company. What if she should fall in love with any one of these men? True, Maddio was old enough to be her father, but in heart he was fresh as a boy, and prone to indulge in romantic sentiment. Maddio, moreover, though kept from sin by native goodness and innocence, acted up to no code of laws, human or divine, and might at any moment commit some culpable though not ill-meaning indiscretion. Oh! if Aglaë would take warning, and save herself from what would be a crowning shame and sorrow to them all!

The poor woman wasted herself to a shadow with secret misgivings and self-reproach; and none saw how she suffered, except Ingaretha. Again and again, she entreated her to speak out, but in vain. Euphrosyne would ever parry the loving thrusts, and declare that she had no especial reasons for concern.

"But you know, dearest child," she would say, smiling plaintively, "that I am not like my husband, able to send cares to the four winds always."

Ingaretha spoke to Monsieur Sylvestre, but as well expect the bluebottle that has alighted on some curate's nose to understand the Ten Commandments he is reading as Monsieur Sylvestre to admit the existence of any unseen evil in this pleasant world.

"My wife is over-anxious—that is all," he said lightly. "Have we not in our possession all the blessings intellectual man can desire—freedom, friends, the happy consciousness



"THE TWO LOOKED AT IT TOGETHER."

of a destiny fulfilled? No harm can happen to us—except to leave them for ever.”

At last, Ingaretha lost patience, and one morning, when she found herself alone with her old friend, gave free utterance to what was passing in her mind.

“My dear Madame Sylvestre,” she said, “do be frank with me. You do not eat—I am sure you do not sleep, and you are growing thinner every day. It is Aglaë! Aglaë alone who is making you miserable; I know it without a word.”

“I naturally feel great inquietude about the dear child’s future.”

“Do you really love her?” Ingaretha asked sharply. To her, Aglaë had ever seemed cold and unattractive.

“Young, friendless, and unhappy, could any one help being drawn towards her?”

“I am not drawn towards her, I confess,” Ingaretha answered. “It sounds a little hard to say so. But it seems to me that her friendlessness and unhappiness are of her own making.”

“She had a bad mother,” Euphrosyne said with bitter emphasis.

“It is impossible to believe that she does not exaggerate her grievances, seeing her discontent here, although overwhelmed with kindness.” Ingaretha went on, still warm and indignant, “If she were as wretched as she represents herself to be, would she sing, dance, and coquet upon every opportunity? I mistrust alike her sorrow and her penitence.”

Euphrosyne looked pained and unconvinced. It was rarely she contradicted Ingaretha in anything, but though silent, as usual, to-day, her face broke through the rule and betokened opposition.

“Oh! let her go home,” Ingaretha added, in a voice of entreaty. “She has duties there; here she hinders others from doing theirs. Do not be angry with me. I feel soon she will work mischief if she stays.”

Still Euphrosyne said nothing. Ingaretha took her hand and put her arm around her neck.

“Who is this stranger that she should make you so unhappy? Let me be a daughter to you instead, since I love you a thousand times better than she does.”

“Oh!” said Euphrosyne, trying to steady her voice and master the mysterious agitation that possessed her. “I do not deserve to be loved either by her or by you. You would never guess how unworthy I am,” tears began to flow as she added, kissing the girl’s hand meekly. “If I could love you a little less, I could confide to you a little more, but affec-

tion makes us very proud. I cannot humble myself to the dust before you.”

“Why should you humble yourself to the dust before any one?” Ingaretha said, returning that penitent kiss by a dozen full of grateful affection, and adding half playfully, “If any of us are fit company for the saints, it is you, and you only.”

Euphrosyne shook her head mournfully.

“I have willed to live nobly,” she answered, “but, alas! my spiritual conceptions have ever been imaged in clay; so victoriously has flesh warred against spirit since my youth upwards until now. Before me moved always a golden vision—the far-off, the ideal, the divine, and when I reached it and embraced it, all that was godlike had vanished, the gross and earthly alone remaining behind. God knows how I have struggled with myself. Yet it has been always so.”

Her cheeks had turned from deathly white to fever red, her eyes were unnaturally lustrous, her voice strange, her brow covered with perspiration. Ingaretha felt a sudden pang of apprehension. Was her old friend’s sensitive nature wrought upon by domestic difficulties to a pitch of insanity? How to account otherwise for this agony of doubt and introspection, out of keeping as it seemed with the occasion? “Which of us can say that we have wrought out our ideals into a perfect life?” she said. “If you have not satisfied yourself, think of those you have helped and encouraged. I, for one, without you should have lost my way many and many a time.”

“No, oh no; you must not say that. Seek wisdom, sweet one, rather from those who have walked in a lowly path of duty without stumbling, than those who have kept their eyes fixed on the stars, whilst treading forbidden ways. None have sinned more grievously than I.”

“Thus each of us say in our secret hearts,” Ingaretha said in a sorrowful voice.

“Ah, you do not know all!”

“You could not tell me anything that would make me love you less, or more. Of whom else could one say that?”

Euphrosyne shook her head.

“I am such a coward, or I would speak out,” she said, with a look of unspeakable misery in her face. “But I dare not, I dare not, though I am killing myself with silence. I love you too dearly to make you unhappy on account of my evil-doings.”

And saying that she embraced her as passionately as if for the last time in life, and left the room.

For several days after this interview Madame Sylvestre used to steal away from the others, and shutting herself in her bed-room, write assiduously. Her sanctuary invaded, pencil and paper were hidden away, slyly as the beloved romance of some nursery novelist, and a week slipped by ere her task was done. Then an untidy little manuscript, composed of a dozen blank sheets of letters, and fastened together by a piece of darning wool, was one day thrust in Ingaretha's pockets by deft hands.

This manuscript was a letter, and on the outer leaf was written in large characters—*Keep my secret.*

CHAPTER XLII.—A CONFESSION.

I DO not know, I cannot guess, how you will receive this communication from me. If, as I have a right to expect, your respect vanishes and your love grows cold, suffer not my husband to perceive the change. This is all the mercy I ask at your hands, and I am unworthy to ask even that little. Oh! my beautiful, my beloved Ingaretha, would to God I had never been rejoiced at your loveliness, and solaced with your affection! then I should not have known what it is to have consorted with angels and be thrust from their company into the bottomless pit. So greatly I suffer in this self-abasement, that I think it is the helplessness of those dear ones around me only, for which I shall henceforth live. How easy it were to die when life reproaches you, not sorrowfully but in anger, with mocking fingers on its lips! Dearest child, picture me thirty years ago as of your own age, but already a wife and mother, widow of a man double my years, and mother of children over whose future I was to have no more control than the *mère de lait* whom they had loved twice as well as myself in their infancy. Figure to yourself such a position, and you need not ask whether I was happy. I had inherited from my father, a man of rare gifts but some eccentricities, all kinds of qualities that warred against the life to which marriage condemned me—love of learning, habits of inquiry, passionate enthusiasm for reform, and craving after new ideas, whether in religion, in politics, or in art. My intellect, of its own accord, burst the bonds of spiritual despotism, in other words, the Romish Church,—had found itself, like a child's kite, tossed this way and that, wafted ever and anon a little way towards the supreme light, but invariably borne downwards, sometimes rent with agonized effort, at others soiled

with earth-stained tears. A Frenchwoman, the descendant of noble-spirited men and women, who had laid down their lives in the cause of liberty, no wonder that the era of their martyrdom, the French Revolution, was constantly in my thoughts. I envied the destiny that had been so dear to them, and the privilege they had enjoyed of making the last sacrifice for humanity. "Is this to live?" I cried in the bitterness of my isolated self-condemnation; bearer of a name I do not honour, mother of children I am forbidden to rear, head of a household in which I count as a cipher! It seemed to me a death in life for which the grave would have been a kindly exchange. In such terror of my heresies had my husband stood, that, according to his will, my little girls were to be kept in the convent till they should be eighteen; and though he could not prevent them from being with me in their holidays, he had provided a counteraction against such evil influences in the presence of an elder sister, who was bound over to stay with us. I cannot blame her for having made me suffer, seeing the differences of opinion that existed between us.

The monotonous years dragged to a close, I know not how, and suddenly stopped. My heart beat fast once more. The morning sun was pleasant. The roses in our garden seemed glorious things. I found myself singing in the dreary, old château, like an escaped bird. For the first time, I had seen him who is now my husband. O Ingaretha! I am old now, and that day seems no more to belong to my life than an exalted vision, a golden dream! Yet it was mine, mine, mine!

Summer had come in my beautiful, beloved France. Our chestnut alleys thrilled with the full-throated songs of nightingale and thrush; our orchards were rosy with apple-blossoms; our little fountain sparkled merrily in the sunshine; the village children, dressed in white and crowned with garlands, kept the festival of Ascension. I was left alone in the château with an old servant.

Idling over some needlework out of doors, I was suddenly aroused by the sound of a man's voice, the most musical I had ever heard, and, looking up, saw a superb figure standing before me, gracious, statuesque, beautiful beyond dreams. Bare-headed he stood on the threshold of my little summer-house, sunshine on his brow, eyes, and beard; never were youth and intellectual beauty and love typified in a nobler image! By a few words the

stranger put me at my ease. He then presented a letter of introduction. I begged him to be seated, and forthwith he told his errand.

He was by profession a teacher of mathematics, he said, and wished to settle down at V—— for the present, if circumstances so favoured him that he could there fairly earn his bread. I promised to do my best to help him; he thanked me, and went away.

I became one of his pupils, throwing heart and soul into a study for which my mental characteristics peculiarly fitted me; and from that time life became new and wonderful. It was not his plan to teach isolated facts. He saw a divine unity of plan running alike through the world of nature and of science—Nature's interpretations—and to express and elucidate this unity, he brought together myriads of experiences and deductions, which, in his hands, became fused into the light of universal truth. Marvellous were the stores of knowledge he had gained, more marvellous still his power of assimilating it and appropriating it to others. His love of humankind was second only to his thirst after spiritual perfection; and, swayed alternately by motives of a vehement benevolence and dreamy abstraction, he was one day a moralist, the next a visionary.

I had been in the habit of seeing him for about a month, when he poured out to me his social views and his belief in the approaching material and moral regeneration of mankind by means of the modern Social Reformers. For the first time I found myself in the company of an ardent disciple of Fourier, that great original thinker, who saw in the glorification of labour and of pleasure, the associated home or phalanstery, the future happiness of the human race. In glowing words, the systems of St. Simon, Robert Owen, and other socialist dreamers were described to me, till I felt lost in the contemplation of the universal paradise into which they were about to turn the world. I looked around me; I studied history; I was appalled by the selfishness that not even Christianity, nor civilisation, nor the French Revolution had eradicated from the rich, the refined, and the happy. Could I believe that such a state of things—misery, toil, ignorance, on the one side, self-indulgence, ease, and intellectual freedom, on the other—was destined to be perpetual? I believed, rather, in the goodness of God and of man, and said, No. The prison-walls of my

soul crumbled away. All around became vast, luminous, melodic. I realised at last what I had hitherto striven after darkly, the rich capacity of individual life. Even I, a woman, was no worthless or ignoble creature, but a link not to be spared in the chain of universal being, a power for good or evil among my fellows, an entity designed for some special purpose by the great Creator. I felt as if all my sex must be glorified in the divine conviction that now possessed me. What the greatest of the ancient philosophers had denied us, what the apostles of Christianity ignored, what mediæval reformers and modern revolutionary leaders doubted or despised, these latter-day prophets, these so-called Socialists, acknowledge, without stint or spare, namely, the dignity of women. They alone, of all would-be conquerors and iconoclasts, hurled to the ground the hideous dictum that Might is Right, and willed to govern the world by moral instead of physical force. Could I choose but accept such teaching joyfully? I, who had been treated as a cipher, a child, a slave in my husband's house?

And when one day he who had been alike my teacher, prophet, and friend, who had transformed existence from a weary and useless burden into a precious and fruitful usufruct, and filled the future with a thousand happy expectancies, said with trembling lips and eyes brimful of tears—"I love you. Go with me to the Far West, and let us work together in the cause of humanity"—ah! you who are also given to generous womanly impulses, will know how my heart leaped at the thought of sharing the ambition of such a man! All other love, all other duty seemed dead within me. By the old I had been cast out and despised, by the new I was exalted and enlarged. I saw nothing behind me but monotony, neglect, and insignificance; before me rose height upon height of intellectual and spiritual effort, which by his side I felt strong enough to climb.

Could I condemn myself to nothingness when such a career lay before me? Could I separate myself from one so beautiful, so good, so enthusiastic, the only being in the world to whom I was linked by the supreme ties of soul-reaching sympathy? That I loved him, and that my love for him has been the one passion of my life, I need not say to you.

For days I wrestled with myself. My children had been allowed to love me scantily: but I was their mother. My husband had distrusted me; but I was once his wife and bore his name. My home had never

grown sweet and familiar, but it was the home which he had given me. A thousand times I said to myself that I would stay and carry my secret to the grave. He, however, was not to be easily won over to such renunciation. Openly as became a man and a lover he spoke out to my kinsfolk, and of course spoke in vain. It came to this—I had to choose between my children and my lover.

Looking back upon that time, Ingaretha, I marvel at my decision. I cannot conceive of any woman so deciding against her home, her ancestral faith, and her children. It is true that the first had been estranged from me, the second I had long before voluntarily discarded, the last was not as yet endeared. It is, moreover, true that I could only see a very trifling good to be gained by this supreme self-sacrifice required of me, whilst plenary acceptance involved devotion to the whole human race, and, as I could but believe, the completed happiness of one who seemed to me noblest of noble men. But I reasoned wrong in this—radically, irretrievably wrong. To diverge from the plain path of duty is to incur an incalculable responsibility—I do not say always for evil or for nought—nay, it may even be in the end for good, but how rarely! We cannot be quite sure that the supreme crisis by which a grand soul is so misled and mastered as to will what seems, but is not, good, bears always evil results. To him who is conquered by his own passions, no matter how elevating and magnanimous, the secret retribution is without doubt bitter, but the prescribed good struggled after may have been attained. The world stands by, unedified and unbelieving.

Think of my children, Ingaretha, and pity me. Can I believe now that my love might not have helped those motherless, fatherless little ones—that my life, however sad and narrow, might not have been good and pitiful in their eyes? God had made me a mother of women-children, and I could pause deliberating where my proper duty and highest destiny lay.

Well, I went away with him, and his love proved a sweeter and better thing than I had rapturously dreamed. We lived no common life, indulged in no mean aspirations, consorted with no gross or uncongenial natures. How glorious existence seemed to me in those early years of second marriage, second birth! I—who had been heretofore wrapped in the commiseration of my own dreary undeveloped self—now became the companion and equal of experienced, enthusiastic men, of high-spirited and courageous women. In the Far

West we joined an ardent little community of Fourierists, and with them for some years lived harmoniously. Our manner of life was simple but laborious, pleasure-loving, pure. Every one toiled and span, but every one reaped and enjoyed. On festivals, which came often, we had music and dancing in gaily-garlanded halls. The children, like Bacchanals, sported about us, their little brows decked with chaplets and flowers in their hands. The old joined in their pastime. It seemed, indeed, as if the dream of a golden age had come true. And we had our religious holidays also, on which occasions old and young, rich and poor, marched in solemn procession to our Temple, where we consecrated Birth, Love, and Death, and there celebrated the Jubilee of Seed-time and Harvest with joyous canticles.

But this idyllic existence was not without shadows. Is it impossible for the lofty dreamer, in clothing his aspirations with substantial form, to eliminate every particle of material dross? Alas! my experience says yes. I have dwelt in daily communings with idealists and reformers; I have worked side by side with those whose sole aim it was to spiritualise and enlarge their fellow-men; I have seen this generous fervour kindle divine emotions, stifle unworthy instincts, throw a halo around simple souls. Yet in none has the outward realisation of inward ideals been complete and unsullied by earthly contact. Alas that I should have to confess thus much to you!

The little association was broken up, and we returned to Europe, then in the throes of a universal revolution. We stayed in Paris during the terrible years following 'Forty-eight. The *coup d'état* saw our friends and fellow-workers outlawed, incarcerated, massacred. My husband was one of the 'Déportés,' and his place of exile was Africa. What we suffered in the unhealthy plain of La Maison Carrée I cannot now recall without a shudder. The water was poisonous, the air freighted with miasma, the people hostile, and the land a wilderness. We escaped, marvellously enough, with our lives, and after some years were allowed to change our place of abode. In the plain of the Sig a few scattered followers rallied round the standard of Fourier, and again an associated family, or phalanstery, was formed, my husband being always the leading spirit. He was adored as if he had been a god. At that who can wonder?

And all this time no looked-for retribution had come upon me. Pestilence, pillage,

burnings, and famine were hard to bear, but they befell the innocent as well as the guilty—good, true, long-suffering mothers, as well as her who had forsaken her fatherless little ones. Fever and famine spared me. The earthquake destroyed me not. I moved like one wearing a charmed life, and his love was so sweet that I never prayed to die. For his sake I was content to live and remember, were life and memory to last a hundred years. But at last, and in most unlooked-for fashion, has my punishment come. How can I tell you the truth? How can I keep silence? Think a little, Ingaretha. Guess the sequel of this sorrowful story.

You have lately chidden me for undue concern in the welfare of the young stranger whose coming has caused us all so much embarrassment and anxiety. Something of her history is already known to you. Add to it the early portion of my own, and pity us both, love me still a little if you can. For the faults of this poor child, her mother—your poor broken-hearted Euphrosyne—alone is responsible. Do not utterly reject her. My tears blot the page. I can only add, on my knees, Forgive, forgive.

EUPHROSYNÉ.

CHAPTER XLII.—CONFLICTS.

INGARETHA honoured Euphrosyne above every living soul. The girl's expansive nature had found in her old friend that complete and rounded sympathy which no other friendship, not even René's, had as yet yielded. Where Euphrosyne loved, she loved passionately, and Ingaretha was among her dearest. Difference of years, of position, of nationality, had not stood in the way of as sweet and high-souled a friendship as ever knit two good women. To Euphrosyne, Ingaretha seemed the loveliest and most lovable of human things. To Ingaretha, Euphrosyne was a model of wisdom, resignation, dignity. The brightness and freshness of the one were a constant refreshment and delight; the tenderness and elevation of the other, a constant solace and admonition. Both were striving from day to day to mould their lives into noble shape. Both lived as much in the inner spiritual world of aspiration and endeavour as in the palpable world of fact and reality.

And what a blow was this! Unforeseen, irrevocable, never to be forgotten whilst the sun rose and set, for poor Ingaretha!

She sat with the letter in her hand, not knowing how the time passed, hoping, yet dreading to be disturbed, longing for some excuse, even some physical pain that might give her reason to wail and wring her hands,

and walk up and down the room distractedly. But she could not do this. She must go about her daily work, dry-eyed, calm-browed, with measured footstep, and tell no one of the hell of doubt in which her spirit dwelt.

"Oh, if René were but here!" escaped her lips, and then on a sudden she turned red and white, and trembled in every limb.

What if he too had his secret? And Monsieur Sylvestre? And Maddio? None of all these had held so high a place in her affections as Euphrosyne. None had been so childishly revered, so lovingly and entirely leaned on, so adored on bended knee. Euphrosyne fallen from her high pinnacle, could these weaker ones hold their place?

She thrust off the unworthy suspicion, and tried to reason away her abhorrence of Euphrosyne's life-secret. After all, she was a woman, and being herself a woman she could afford to judge her gently, and forgive until the seventieth time seven. The others might have committed lesser crimes than she, but what were their temptations in comparison with her own? They could not have suffered as she had suffered, struggled as she had struggled, yielded on the same ground that she had yielded. Her sin towards her children was irredeemable; but had not society sinned irredeemably towards Euphrosyne? How many women would have done graver harm without such apparent cause for self-reproach? Thus much might be said in justification of one who did not seek to justify herself; her life had been no whited sepulchre. What she had done amiss, had been done openly, to be judged both of God and man. But repeat as she might that oft-banded phrase, 'more sinned against than sinning,' Ingaretha could not find rest or comfort. The friend of her bosom was fallen from her high estate, never, never to be so high set up any more. Impulsive and devoted as she was, Ingaretha was too clear-minded not to take in at a glance the height, and breadth, and depth of this woman's wrong-doing, and though full of love and compassion, she could not straightway throw herself in her arms, saying, 'All is with us as before.'

Over our poor Ingaretha's soul brooded a darkness she could not dispel. Seeing how grievously the shortcomings of those to whom she was indifferent had troubled her, how she had lately vexed herself about the little-mindedness, and malice, and animosity of her so-called friends and neighbours, it was no wonder that a downright piece of wrong-doing in one she honoured and adored should torment her almost beyond endurance.

"I will expect nothing from any one henceforth," she said to herself with extreme bitterness; "nothing, nothing, nothing. Who is proof against temptation? Who is true to his highest instincts? Who is entirely good and true and noble? If not Euphrosyne, then none in all the world."

She wept abundantly. Sadder tears she had never shed.

At last her passion was spent, and she reproached herself only.

"What am I, that I should judge her?"

she cried: "I, who have had fine opportunities, and yet have lived no noble life. Ought I not rather to fall on her neck and embrace her, confessing my own faults, my own backslidings, my own littlenesses? I have believed in myself too much; taking for granted that what I willed to do was invariably well done, I have set myself above those who were content to act up to a simpler code of duty. I have tried to do more than others; and yet if I died to-morrow, would go to God empty-handed."



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Thus, half praying, half meditating, she passed a long hour of retrospection. Then she wrote a little pencilled note to Euphrosyne, which ran as follows:—

"What am I, that I should judge you? I will keep your secret as long as I live; but let us never talk of it. Yours ever,

"INGARETHA."

That was all. Euphrosyne would know that her friend remained her friend still. To say that she did not suffer in the other's self-abasement would have been to slander the name of friendship. Time could heal Inga-

retha's wound, but time itself could not eradicate the scar.

When the two met for the first time, it was Ingaretha whose voice faltered, whose cheek changed colour, whose hands trembled. Self-controlled, and almost cold in her pride of humiliation, Euphrosyne was fain to draw back from the proffered hand, to withhold the expected kiss; but Ingaretha, with sudden emotion, put her arms around her and kissed her fervently on the lips. Then, others being present, each took refuge in self-imposed calm, and after the first meeting was over, the rest seemed easy.

But Ingaretha had learned one obvious lesson from Euphrosyne's life that she would never forget. Day and night she kept applying to her own case the moral of her friend's story; and it was a long time before she could clearly see her way through the mazes of doubt and difficulty with which she was beset.

How could she so order her future life as to subserve it to one guiding principle of right? To dash blindly at generous deeds without weighing their ethical importance, was but to follow Euphrosyne's example, that is to say, to do evil that good might come; or at least, like the dog in the immortal fable, to throw away a small substantial good, for a large but shadowy resemblance of it.

Clearly her duty lay in this dull English village, among these slangy, fox-hunting gentlemen, and insipid, novel-reading ladies; among these ignorant, beer-besotted ploughmen, and drudging, unjoyful housewives. Here she had a position, a career, a standpoint, unsatisfactorily as she might occupy the first, imperfectly as she might fulfil the second, slowly as she might advance from the last, the good to be accomplished and the evil to be combated, were defined.

And there was, moreover, this to be said about her home-life. She had a tradition to keep up, a wonderful anchor to unsteady souls! Her opinions, actions, ambitions, were not only of importance in the world's eyes on her own account, but on account of those who had gone before her—ancestors and ancestresses—who had been high-spirited, hard-working men and women. She could not console herself by the universal sophism that such and such a line of conduct would be admissible because of her own insignificance; as if any one's conduct were insignificant.

How she worked out her life-problem, mattered, most of all, to herself, having a personal affection for those of her name who had done well before her, because of inherited responsibility. Being her father's daughter, she was bound to live worthily for his sake.

Amid perplexing thought upon thought, broke, with sudden flash, a ray of conviction. What Eastern travel had failed to teach her, and the happy South, and other many-coloured experiences, she should surely learn in the New World. Her mind turned with joyful leap towards America. There, humanity, with loins girded like a young athlete, was setting to work to build up a new and

equitable society. Could she do better, could René do better, than journey thither and profit by the teachings of the younger and happier country? Many of the social problems, over which they were puzzled, had there found pacific solution—education of the people, emancipation of the working-men, a free church, and so on. Such a step would surely be the most fitting apprenticeship to the guild of social reformers they proposed to enter. They might learn little, and be wanting in moral and intellectual power to apply that little, but they would at least have gone to the best school before pretending to teach others.

On René's willingness to accede to any wishes of her own, Ingaretha knew she might confidently reckon. His love for her was no calm affection, bond-servant of the intellect and the will, but the over-mastering passion of a reckless nature, that owned neither kingship nor statute. Contemplating such a passion, she might well feel alternately proud, joyful, and afraid.

CHAPTER XLIII.—DÉSILLUSIONNÉ.

WHAT should she do with her child? asked the unhappy mother a hundred times a day. The expected solace for which she had sacrificed so much had not come. Ingaretha was in her secret, still cold and implacable, held aloof from Aglaë. She could forgive her own sins and shortcomings, but she could not take the victim of both to her heart. Euphrosyne was at a loss to understand this hardness in one of Ingaretha's large nature. She forgot that if youth is twice as generous as age, it is also twice as hard. And she lost sight of the fact that was ever present in Ingaretha's mind, namely, the amount of suffering Aglaë's failing in duty towards others had caused herself. "Let Aglaë go," said Ingaretha. But Euphrosyne hesitated.

At last matters were brought to an unexpected crisis by the departure of the brothers Carrington. It happened in the small hours, and with the usual circumstances attending a nocturnal flight. They had lent Monsieur Sylvestre money, but they had borrowed more. They had paid some of his debts, but had incurred greater ones. They had helped to till his fields, but they had also helped to waste his substance.

The news fell like a thunderbolt one morning when the accustomed chairs at the breakfast table were empty. Maddio refusing to believe that two such pleasant gentlemen could decamp after this fashion, searched their rooms and returned to the search again

and again. But, to use a homely local phrase, 'neither feather nor bone were to be seen of them;' they had gone, taking their worldly possessions, and something over and above, no one knew whither. Monsieur Sylvestre breakfasted calmly; dropping a consolatory word now and then to his crest-fallen companions. Aglaë wept copiously, recalling the pleasant talks, the toils lightened by companionship, the evening recreations gone for ever. Euphrosyne's heart sank within her as she contemplated the havoc in their prospects made by this piece of unparalleled treachery; Maddio never once raised his eyes from his plate.

"Be not cast down, my children," Monsieur Sylvestre cried cheerily. "It is not ourselves upon whom obloquy is cast—an abundant consolation for larger disasters. Had we done amiss, I would cry out in a twinkling, 'On with your sackcloth, down on your knees, sprinkle your ashes.' But we have done our best for these misguided brethren. Let that memory comfort the innocent, and lead the guilty to better things."

Aglaë was inconsolable. She refused to help in the dairy since there was no longer a chivalrous fellow-worker to beguile the labour with song and jest. Dominoes lost their attraction. Vainly might Maddio solicit her hand for the waltz, or her aid in the poultry-yard and kitchen-garden. She was sullen, reserved, almost vindictive. Euphrosyne saw that now if ever the Gordian knot might be cut, and her mental tortures and terrors allayed for ever. Aglaë was ready to go. Every day added to her present *ennui*. Every day lessened her past animosities. Again and again she began penitent little notes to her husband, which stopped midway, and were never despatched. At last Euphrosyne spoke to Monsieur Sylvestre. Would he say the word, without which Aglaë would never find moral courage to depart? It was clearly his duty, she reasoned, and who could tell how long they might have shelter to offer her? The last piece of treachery had incurred losses they would not easily get over. Their friend Ingaretha would soon be thousands of miles away, and unable to protect them. They were in duty bound to reduce their expenses to the minimum, seeing that she was their only benefactor. Thus reasoned Euphrosyne, the ever practical, ever well-intentioned. But as well talk to the winds and waves as preach expediency to Monsieur Sylvestre.

"Heavens, dear wife," cried the philosopher, out of breath with impatience, "thou talkest like one of the prattling children of unreason!

That this dear child has other claims upon her I do not deny. But there is an elective affinity in duties as well as in affections, and with admirable perception indeed has the great Fourier seized and applied both truths. Were it not for this happy interposition, humanity would ever blindly sway between two motives. Instinct kicks the beam, and humanity is saved. 'Who are our relations?' says Fourier. Not primarily those who being descended from a common progenitor chancewise bear our name. Rather those with whom we are linked by spiritual kinship, whose ideas claim common parentage with our own, no matter how divergent may be our material ancestries.' This child recognises in us her instinctive, if not her natural protectors. Be it far from us to repel such generous advances, worth more in this mercenary world than treasures of silver and gold."

"But she has a husband, dear one. Thou forgettest——"

"Bah! does any union which lacks the communion of souls deserve the name of marriage? Let him go to the——North Pole."

"You do not know all," began Euphrosyne, longing for courage to blurt out, "She is my child!"

"Thank Heaven, I do not know all," rejoined Monsieur Sylvestre with a shrug of the shoulders. "Fortunate are those from whom Pandora has withheld the gift of curiosity. I am happy in ignorance of many things. Why should I pry into mysteries which might disturb my tranquillity?"

"True," sighed Euphrosyne heavily, "and yet there are times when I feel overwhelmed with the conviction that we are seeming better than we are."

"How sayest thou so," asked the other almost in anger, "when the direct contrary is the truth? Maddio is looked upon as a fool or a knave by the vulgar. What angel in heaven is purer and better than he? Thou art sadly misjudged by the outer world, because of thy homely apparel, and perhaps too humble mien. What woman in all the kingdom possesses thy courageous spirit and thy capacious understanding? And as to myself, without undue vanity, I think I may fairly say that I have been morally and intellectually undervalued throughout life. It is always so. The salt of the earth finds favour only in the palates of the spiritual epicurean, namely, the few, in contradistinction to the many, who greedily swallow and grossly digest whatever platitudes and mediocrities are placed before them. Do not too

readily assent to the disparagement of an indiscriminating and often envious world."

Thus a hundred, nay, a thousand times, had Euphrosyne been silenced by this man's eloquence against her better judgment. In clear daylight, her intelligence ever entered upon the impending discussion; midway, it

staggered amid blinding coruscations of wit and flashes of fancy; towards the close, it gave way, dazed, bewildered, mastered by a magic power from which there was no escape.

Again and again the tempted struggled in the meshes, again and again the sophist smiled and had his way.



PART X

CHAPTER XLIV.—A SOCIAL ERINNYS.



L I. this time Ghenilda had not been idle. At the outset of her campaign she had said to herself that all those who had illuded Ingareth should be humbled, and she was as good as

her word. Carew would remonstrate, saying—

"Oh! let the good folks alone. So long as Miss Meadowcourt has a friend to stand by her, what does it matter? I did not bring you here to make our neighbours uncomfortable, but to do her good. Don't turn yourself into a social Erinny."

"I don't know what a social Erinny may be," Ghenilda said laughing, "but I cannot help punishing people who deserve it. There is a sort of virtuous satisfaction about that kind of ill-nature."

"Well, have it your own way. But make things as little unpleasant as possible."

"Oh! Carew, you speak as if the greater part of the world had feelings. Will you never be *désillusionné*, my poor little child?"

And the little lady would lecture her brother with an air of patronising affection he could not withstand. Ghenilda might be a trifle worldly, nay, a trifle foolish, but she was of his blood, she had a kind heart, and she loved him dearly. She, too, loved Ingareth, and he could not find it in his heart to chide or contradict her. It must be confessed that her fashion of carrying out ethical convictions looked somewhat extravagant. Her first step was to organize the wedding on what in that part of the world was a scale of unsurpassed magnificence. Carew being too rich by half for a bachelor, and Carew being chivalrously devoted to this lady, she thought nothing could be better

than that he should give a magnificent festival in her honour. This was to take place on the eve of the wedding-day. Time, taste, and money without stint were to be devoted to it, and it was to be handed down in local tradition as the most splendid local celebration on record.

In vain Carew argued that René's social position and peculiar lot, a dozen reasons besides, rendered advisable some simpler manifestation of cordiality. His little masque, for instance, might be turned to account, and would be a graceful and unostentatious compliment. He had already asked a musical friend to compose suitable music. What so easy as to put the whole thing into the hands of a reliable *impresario*, and have an unpretending drawing-room performance?

"And invite about forty picked people?" asked Ghenilda.

"Invite everybody."

"Oh, no; I can't go in for a sort of tenants' ball. Ingareth is going to feast the poor people; and it is etiquette she should. We are only called upon to give a private entertainment," Ghenilda answered with persistence, "and I am determined to choose my guests discreetly. I will make out a list to-day, leaving you the right of veto."

"And of adding an appendix, of course?"

"Not for the world!"

Carew resigned himself to his fate, leaving the management of everything to Ghenilda, except the putting on the stage of his poetic drama. Upholsterers might do their worst with the house. Ghenilda might commit ravages among the tender feelings of the neighbourhood; his household might, for the time being, slip entirely out of his control. The only point he cared to contest was the management of his masque. That, he determined, should not be vulgarised by upholsterers and theatrical millinery. To make the necessary arrangements, he went to London for a week, leaving Ghenilda quite happy.

"Stay away a fortnight, dear boy, if you can," she said, as she kissed him on the doorstep; "you will be terribly in the way for next week."

No sooner was he fairly off than a series of preparations was begun on the largest, costliest, and noisiest scale.

Carew had bound over the mistress of the ceremonies not to meddle with his play, but

nothing had been said about the theatre. Ghenilda determined that it should be magnificent. She devoted to the subject every moment she could possibly spare from her boy's society, and with the fashionable young clerk from Johnson and Gingham's, in Oxford Street, threw heart and soul into the subject.

The difficulties seemed enormous. There were no rooms that were not either too small, too narrow, or too many cornered. Taking down hangings and doors did not cure the evil; removing every obstruction in the way of cabinets and tables did not cure it either. Unless the walls were knocked in, it was impossible to accommodate a moderate audience. Idea after idea occurred; first of a Grecian theatre with tents, on the lawn; but it would be sure to rain, and people were horribly afraid of catching cold, said Lady Micheldever. The clerk sighed, sympathised with my lady's difficulties, but was too modest to make suggestions.

"If we had the entrance-hall to work upon, my lady, we could do ourselves credit," at last he said desperately and with the air of a genius surprised at its own flights.

"Capital!" cried Ghenilda joyfully. "The entrance-hall is exactly what we want. Block up the front door, turn the conservatory into a public entrance, do away with the ante-rooms, and the rest will be easy."

Forthwith began the work of destruction, which was continued lustily from dawn till well-nigh midnight. Chip, chip, went the mason's chisel; tap, tap, the carpenter's hammer. Little Micheldever thought it good fun to see the white-capped workmen on their high stools—to him they seemed in the sky. Ghenilda clapped her hands at the success of her plan. "If the work goes on as it has begun," she said, "by the time Carew returns the worst part will be over."

But Carew, with the restlessness of your poet and lover, who never kept appointments, and always made his journeys a little sooner or a little later than he had agreed upon, returned unexpectedly by the mail train one night, and finding no front door in its usual place, thought he must be either crazed or drunk. The coachman drove round and round the house in vain—the accustomed door had disappeared. At last gravel was thrown upon the butler's window, who let in his master through the back way, and explained everything. Carew returned to London by an early train next day.

It was not likely that the splendour of Ghenilda's preparations went unnoticed. Rumours got afloat of the hundreds of yards of blue and gold stuff with which the hall was being draped; of the elegance with which the temporary theatre was being erected; of the choice musical entertainment to be given; of the importance of the guests who were invited from a distance, and so forth. The truth was, of course, magnified a hundred-fold, till, what with curiosity as to the real state of the case and suspense as to who should be invited, the life of the majority became almost unbearable. Ghenilda laughed to herself, guessing pretty well what was going on in people's minds.

It is hardly necessary to say that the looked-for reaction regarding Ingaretha's engagement had long since taken place. People blamed themselves for the impetuosity with which they had jumped to conclusions.

"Why, oh, why," cried these self-convicted offenders, "did the gods deny us discretion?" They hastened to make amends by falling at Ingaretha's feet, and she received them kindly.

"How forgiving you are!" cried Ghenilda. "Nothing would have induced me ever to be civil again to such Philistines."

But Ingaretha had no intention of being uncivil to the Philistines. She saw in this universal bowing down before Ghenilda something better than mere tuft-worship or time-serving.

It was quite likely that, without such intervention at all, good sense and good feeling would finally have had their way; and, if it were otherwise, might not intellectual obtuseness, rather than moral perverseness, be the stumblingblock? Whether Ghenilda's example was followed because of her exalted social position, or because of an honest conviction that without such an example would never have dawned upon her neighbours' minds, mattered little. She was only too thankful to shake hands all round and be at peace with them once more. Of course her kinsfolk still held back. But who is so lost to the real condition of things as to expect reasonable behaviour from those of our own blood? Blessed are the railways, that enable us to get away from our relations in a short space!

Meantime came the season of flowers, corn, and fruit, the full-blown summer, arrayed like Solomon in all his glory. Perfect days and splendid nights glided by in quick succession, till what had seemed far off

as the blossoming of seeds yet unsown, became a thing of to-morrow.

René was on his way home.

CHAPTER XLV.—FIRST DAYS OF FREEDOM.

RENE, speeding by Great Eastern Railway through the glowing Suffolk landscapes towards St. Beowulf's Bury, had no presentiment of the magnificent reception in store for him. He could not yet believe that Ingaretha's lips would seal what Ingaretha's hands had written, that she would say finally what she had said once, that she would take his democratic standpoint, his ruinous fortunes, his discredited name, and make them her own for ever and ever. It was too wonderful to be true, he thought. Ha! it was no small blessing to be free once more; to see a broad expanse of summer sky, to smell the sweets of cottage-gardens, to nod a blithe "Good morrow" to little children, as they watched the train go by at village stations; to feel himself a man amongst men, neither gagged nor fettered, free to speak out his thoughts, to wave his hat for liberty and the people, to hasten whithersoever he would in their service.

He marvelled at the calmness of his fellow-travellers, whose minds seemed full to the brim with buying and selling, going and coming, and the still more trivial business of the day. Could they be ignorant of the supreme struggle convulsing all Europe? of the universal revolution taking place, wherever the people suffered? of the light that was breaking upon combined human intelligence? of the tide of peace and progress slowly but inevitably setting in? They needed only his experience to quicken their benumbed spirits with something like fire.

For what was any pain or penalty of Nature's imposition set against the tyranny of man over man? To be shipwrecked, struck down by lightning, wasted with fever, unhoused by earthquakes, was a light misfortune in comparison to this same most diabolical resource of tyrants, of which he knew more than most. We are apt to rail against the animosities of nature for the most part felt to be beyond our control; but what is the first lesson history teaches us?—That from the smallest to the greatest evils with which humanity has been afflicted, the larger portion is self-imposed, in her own power to cure or hinder. O blind teachers of the blind! thought René, secretly apostrophizing

the spiritual, social, and intellectual leaders of the day, of what good are your sermons on holiness, your acts of charity, your educational schemes, whilst you do not inculcate the divine principle, without which these are bitter as apples of Sodom in the people's mouths, godless as vessels of clay in their hands? And this divine principle, which the great Comte has called a truism, which we Socialists call solidarity, which poets praise, knowing it not, under the name of sympathy, is the same for which I, among worthier victims, suffer; which makes despotism quake, although its heel is on our necks; which will, must, being God's precept, vanquish in the end.

Thus he mused, whilst being borne through the glowing Suffolk landscape.

The train flew past the beautiful environment of Sudbury, Gainsborough's town, undulated pastures, clear little rivers, along which many a barge was lazily gliding in the sunshine, majestic screens of interlaced elm and oak he saw, pleasant farm-houses here and there, patterns of thrift and order. All these sights filled the heart of our poor wearied René with ecstasy. He put his head out of the window and drew in greedy breaths of the balmy air; he forgot how time went in the unaccustomed enjoyment of lovely things; and started and turned pale when the train came gradually to a stand-still, and the porters shouted '*St. Beowulf's Bury!*'

Was he already there? It seemed impossible. But, before him, with flowers in their hands, stood smiling and weeping, his good old friends, Monsieur Sylvestre, and Euphrosyne, and Maddio, and behind them Amy Greenfield, also tearful, holding Bina and Sammie by the hand, and Carew, waving his hat, advanced from an open carriage in which sat a lady, young and beautiful, but not Ingaretha, with a little boy at her side. René sprang forward, fell on Monsieur Sylvestre's neck, kissed Euphrosyne on the cheek, and gave a hand to all the rest by turns. At first no one spoke. After a few minutes none seemed able to keep silence. Bina and Sammie, who had drawn back blushing and stammering a moment before, now took entire possession of their old playmate. Euphrosyne repeated the question again and again. "Thou art well, dear child?" Monsieur Sylvestre, who had recovered his sportive humour, now rallied his companions upon their uncontrolled emotion. Maddio having dried his eyes, put his handkerchief in his pocket.

Then Carew came up, calm, gracious, cordial.

"My sister trusts that you will allow her to drive you home," he said, "and we shall both feel grateful if you will become our guest for the present."

"We had hoped Monsieur René would have come to us; Sammie's little bed is all ready for him," began Amy, in a voice of meek disappointment.

"And we also expected him," Euphrosyne said.

René was embarrassed.

"Come and speak to my sister, at all events," Carew continued, and taking his arm, straightway conducted him to Lady Micheldever's carriage. Ghenilda smiled her sweetest smile, feeling that in this lover of her friend's she had a half-savage to deal with, and therefore, a conquest to make far more difficult and interesting than those that ordinarily fell to her share. She held out her hand, uttered a perfect little speech, made the child give him a kiss, and finally said that she had driven to St. Beowulf's on purpose to take him home.

Poor René had not a word to say. He detested all fine ladies except Ingaretha, and had never yet consented to sit in any one of her carriages, except an unpretending phaeton. Brimful as he was of burning thoughts and passionate hopes, to drive home by that superb personage in silks, feathers, and laces, to subject himself to the supercilious politeness of her flunkys, to talk of extraordinary things in an ordinary way to Carew's sister? no, he could not do it.

"A thousand thanks, madam," he said, drawing back proudly, "but I cannot do what you ask. I beg to be forgiven. My friends await me. I go with them."

He took off his hat, bowed low, and joining the others, set off to St. Culpho on foot.

In single file the little party trudged off, René in the midst holding a child with each hand. Monsieur and Madame Sylvestre next, lastly, Amy and Maddio. There was at first no coherent talk, merely a babble of happy sounds—how could it be otherwise, seeing what children alike great sorrow and great joy make of us all? But when they had walked for half-an-hour along the familiar road in company, the strangeness of their happiness passed away. Their tongues were loosed, heart leaped to heart as in the days of old.

"Was it very bad in prison?" asked Sammie; "I think I should like to try it just once for a little while."

"And the dear rats? Did you tame them?" asked Bina.

René promised to tell them everything some day.

"But I can invent prettier stories," he added. Then in his turn he poured forth a volley of questions. Was Ingaretha well? Did she expect him that very day? Had the farm prospered? Did Maddio's newspaper still exist? And how were Mrs. Minifie, the rat-catcher, little Mattie, and other old friends?

Half way they rested by the roadside. Here a field-path led to Peasemars, and into this René's companions turned, leaving him with kindly forethought to finish his walk alone. He hurried on, flushing and trembling. Now for the first time the reality flashed on him. He was Ingaretha's lover. How should he greet her, his adored friend, his sovereign lady, his beautiful mistress?

Of course, when her empty carriage returned, she had set out on foot to meet him. A sudden bend of the road brought them face to face. She held out both hands, and, shy as five-year-old maiden enamoured of playmate lover, lifted up her sweet face for a kiss. For a moment both sobbed, but for a moment only; then, hand in hand, they took their homeward way. She was shy for a moment, this sweet, serious, playful Ingaretha; it seemed more difficult than ever to call him René, as she had done, when boy and girl they had planned Utopias together; more difficult than ever to take him under the shelter of her wing and tell him to do this, that, a hundred things good for him and the world. She wished that day she had not been so tall, so strong, so favoured of nature, seeing how pale and thin he had grown, and how difficult he found that five-mile walk.

"We must keep holiday and run about like children for a whole year," she said, dropping on a bank with a sigh of half-feigned fatigue. "What does it matter how the world goes on so long as you are quite happy for a little while?"

It was a childish speech, and blushed for ere fairly uttered. He smiled at her impetuosity, and began to make excuses for what he called his shaggy, hang-dog appearance.

"But I am quite well," he added with an air of vexation. "After two or three good days, you will see me flourish as of old. What matters all the misery now?"

Both were silent for a time, and by little and little glided into a calm and sunny mood.

Overhead glowed the radiant sky flecked with pearly clouds, in hazel thickets close by little full-throated linnets were singing, before them rose a gentle sweep of ripening barley that made a soothing murmur as of little waves. Nature was playing to them in a minor key.

On a sudden René's spirit passed from quiet satisfaction to uncontrollable rapture.

"Has it come true?" he cried, turning towards her with a look of adoration and joy she never forgot. "Has it all come true? The dreams I had in prison, to live with thee in the golden age . . . to see thy golden hair . . . ?"

He covered his face with his hands, and shed the tears that needed no comforter.

CHAPTER XLVI.—BRIDE, BRIDEGROOM, AND WEDDING GUESTS.

WHILST Ingaretha and René were agreed for a short space to 'flee the time carelessly as they did in the golden world,' a great storm was raging in the hearts of the Beowulfians. Whatever hopes and suspicions had lingered in people's minds of the stability of Ingaretha's purpose were now vanished for ever. The first lady of the place was resolved to marry a man of the people. The marriage license was purchased. The bridegroom had come. The wedding-day was fixed.

Like an angry wind that stirs up unwonted currents in a quiet pool, the unwelcome conviction disturbed the minds of the harmless villagers. Mr. Carew's sister, the great lady, who had come down to countenance the affair, might flatter rich people into countenancing it also. They were not to be so hoodwinked. What was Lady Micheldever to them, or they to Lady Micheldever? But with Ingaretha it was quite otherwise. She seemed as much their property as the village church or common. Their grandfathers and great-grandfathers had looked up to her grandfather and great-grandfather, and it was little short of wickedness to be asked now to look down upon this sweet, good, beautiful young lady. On whom did all the wickedness rest? Not on herself, surely, nor her friends and equals—not even on the man she had promised to marry; but on one whose alluring tongue and cunning softness had bewitched her as they had bewitched others, making her see evil in the shape of good, and right in devil's masque. Oh, they hated him, this Monsieur Sylvestre! They would teach him ere long that it was dangerous to

intermeddle with their lady's affairs. Loving as a daughter she had been to him, and this was her reward. Cajoled into a low marriage, despoiled of her future, for aught they knew baptized into some strange and unholy religion. Farther, human craft and human devilry could not go. To have one of their own set in authority over them, forsooth! was this the upshot of Monsieur Sylvestre's charitable teaching? They saw it all clear as day. He had entrapped Ingaretha into this marriage for his own selfish purposes, and already rejoiced in the benefits that were thereby to accrue to himself. If Ingaretha would but open her eyes to see, her ears to hear! They knew well enough that the people at Pilgrim's Hatch were not so good as they should be. There must be truth at the bottom of the queer stories circulating about them all. Monsieur Sylvestre had one or two black wives in Africa, Maddio was no better, and Madame Sylvestre's morals nothing to boast of, as far as they could make out. Had this sinister spirit been checked from the beginning by those in authority—Mr. Whitelock, for instance, or Mr. Minifie, or the preachers at the chapel—all would have been well; but instead of allaying the evil, these leaders of opinion but aggravated it. Mr. Whitelock spoke out his opinions of unbelievers and radicals without reserve, Mr. Minifie winked at any outburst of malice and suspicion, the preachers—several of whom were friends and fellow-workmen—denounced the foreigners and their deeds in strong language. The sense of Ingaretha's shame, and their own helplessness, overwhelmed them with a gloom they could not shake off. What tidings reached their ears of wedding feasts being made ready for the poor, were received with sullen indifference or peevish mistrust. Thus this much-contested marriage was like a medal having two sides, the lower covered with shapes symbolic of evil, the latter stamped with holy images, and wreathed with fair-omened flowers. Happily for bride, bridegroom, and wedding guests, that they only saw the upper side! Care was put away for a season. In René's honour a series of *fêtes* unparalleled in the annals of Culpho were given—music, song, and dance closed the festive day. He, the hero of the hour, lived in it calmly, neither looking backwards nor forwards.

Monsieur Sylvestre was transformed by pure joy; one might almost say transfigured, since it was difficult to believe that he trod the ground so airily without light pinions to

his heels, wore clothing spun in mortal looms, and glowed so radiantly, uncrowned by never-dying roses. His face shone, he moved about with the gaiety and conscious grace of some happy old god. Wherever he went, he scattered beneficent smiles and words, blind to the unsympathetic silence of the dull and unappreciative.

On Ingaretha's neck he hung, with playful speech, a gold chain, as a wedding gift. Had the history of this gold chain been clearly made out, Ingaretha was certainly the original owner of it; but, in Monsieur Sylvestre's eyes, it mattered little how he came by a thing, so long as he had the pleasure of giving it away, and consecrating it by a few choice words, a hand-clasp, or, better still, if circumstances allowed, a kiss.

"See, my exquisite child," he said, as she complimented him on the beauty of his gift, "how in this simple thing a supreme truth is symbolized! Is not love, and that, sister, hardly less divine instinct that draws souls together, irrespective of sex and age, call it sympathy, elective affinity, what you will, here typified? For, pure, rounded, and beautiful, like this chain of virgin gold, is that unalloyed, blissful, and lovely passion, which binds in eternal union the leading spirits of humanity. May you, beloved friend, be a link in it for ever!"

Euphrosyne, sad and pale, was like 'the wedding guest who beat his breast, he could not choose but hear.' Voices from the past were whispering to her from morning till night.

Though outwardly serene, she never for a single instant lost sight of some shadow of evil portended by these fateful bridals. But 'one sad heart beats ever on a happy day.' The others playfully chided her, and that was all.

Even Ingaretha failed to see the only cloud visible on her horizon.

Carew was throwing himself, heart and soul, into his fairy masque, and ever greeted her with a cheerful face. Friends, neighbours, and oh! wonderful, even relations! began to smile upon the bride elect and her bridegroom.

Not a day passed, but costly gifts poured in from all quarters. Postman, railway porter, and lacquey deposited, one after the other, their precious burdens at Ingaretha's door, and other offerings were introduced mysteriously through stone walls and iron bolts, as if through the agency of an Ariel.

Nor was Ingaretha less bountiful than her friends. To Monsieur Sylvestre came several

gifts, all choice and appropriate, we may be sure, which he received with lyric outbursts of love and gratitude.

Of course Maddio was not forgotten, nor Amy and her tribe of hungry-eyed, warm-hearted little ones, who were clothed like little fairy-tale princes in honour of their good angel Ingaretha's wedding. Mrs. Minifie received a token of kindness, and even Aglaë was not forgotten.

What woman can refuse to smile upon beautiful clothes? When, one morning, Euphrosyne woke up to find by her bedside a stately dress, becoming her years and gravity, yet in harmony with the joyfulness of the occasion, accompanied by head-gear and jewels to match, she was lost for a moment in almost girlish delight.

"Wake up, dear husband," she cried, shaking her sleeping lord with trembling hand. "Look at this lovely gown of richest satin, such as an empress might wear, of warmest ruby colour, becoming one of my sombre complexion. Does it not remind thee of the well-attired *châtelaine* thou once wooed in our beautiful France?"

"Ah, the vanity of woman! waking us even from our latest and sweetest slumber," said Monsieur Sylvestre dreamily. "Even to show myself habited as a wedding guest, were it hardly legitimate to disturb such sacred repose. Well, draw up the blinds."

She obeyed; and gloriously the rays of the summer sun streamed in, adding superfluous splendour to the costly robe and jewelled waist-clasp.

"Superb! Thy costume will match my own better than I had hoped," answered the delighted husband. "But be careful to procure a cunning barber; for, with all thy perfections, thy right hand has strangely lost its cunning in the matter of self-adornment. And now let me sleep again, leaving the dress so disposed that my eyes may light on it when awaking, and so enjoy a new surprise."

Feminine-like, she was dying to behold herself in all this unexpected pomp of pearls and satin, but to gainsay her husband was impossible. Later in the day, when she found herself mistress of a spare half hour, Aglaë was taken into her bedroom, and the dress put on.

Aglaë had a knack of adjusting ornaments, arranging hair, tying ribbons, and acquitting herself gracefully of the thousand and one responsibilities of the toilette. To see her adopted mother, as she always called her, for once becomingly and sumptuously

tuously attired filled her with pleasant excitement. In unwonted exuberance of spirits she brushed and plaited the soft brown hair, even now but sparsely silvered, smoothed out the ample skirt, fastened waist-clasp, brooch, and braceles. All the innate coquetry of a Frenchwoman burst on a sudden into full bloom. She clapped her hands, danced, sang, at sight of Euphrosyne's splendour.

"I do love you, my mother," she said, throwing her arms around her neck and kissing, not her cheeks or lips, but her pearls, "I do, I do. Ah, you don't know how much younger and better you look now than in your ugly old gowns! And, strange to say, I am suddenly reminded of my own mother's portrait at home. My aunts used to show it to us sometimes when telling us of all her wickedness——"

"The one painted in miniature?" asked Euphrosyne, forgetting prudence in a moment of pleasurable absorption. Then catching Aglaë's look of bewilderment, she added, with a painful reawakening—

"You have surely described that portrait to me, dearest child. I seem to see it at this moment. Thy mother in those days was considered beautiful even by those who were most unfriendly to her. She wore a dress of plum-coloured satin, and her hair, after the manner of that period, in pyramidal plaits on the top of her head; on her breast a stomacher of old point lace, fastened by an old-fashioned miniature encircled with pearls. Ah! me, how sadly has time changed all that grace into ungainliness!"

She covered her face with her hands and wept aloud.

"What is the matter, dear little mother?" cried the young girl, kneeling at her side. "You are saying such mysterious things that I feel quite frightened. Did you know her, that unnatural parent? Oh! no, no. It cannot be. Let us not talk of her portrait any more, but of your own beautiful dress. I cannot bear to see you weep."

Seeing Aglaë's agitation, Euphrosyne by a great effort recovered self-control. She dried her tears, gave a plausible pretext for her abandonment, and contrived to quell Aglaë's disquietude.

This little scene took place on the third day before the wedding.

CHAPTER XLVII.—THE EVE OF THE WEDDING.

In peerless, full-blown splendour, a queen among summer days, dawned the eve of In-

garetha's wedding. A gentle shower had fallen during the night, and now with quick pulsations of joy thrilled the happy teeming earth. Long stayed the image of that august July day in local memory. Sunshine, foliage, flowers wore a look of unparalleled magnificence for beautiful Ingaretha's sake.

'Red as a rose,' she stepped forth, leaning on René's arm, to say a word or two to the villagers after their mid-day feast in the Abbey garden. Her golden hair gleamed in the sunshine, her white dress looked angelic, soft voice faltered, sweet eyes filled as she thanked the good village-folk for their hearty wishes. Then hats waved in the air, handkerchiefs fluttered, hands were clapped, and a stupendous, soul-moving, old English "Hurrah! hurrah! Long live our lady! Hurrah! hurrah!" sounded not only through the park, but to the village.

When the crowd paused for breath, Ingaretha moved a step forward and said, calmly, though with evident reluctance and perturbation, "Dear friends and neighbours, I hope that your kindness and good-will go not with me only, but with this gentleman whom I have chosen for my friend—my husband," she added, blushing as she corrected herself.

And again a cheer was raised, René bowing acknowledgment somewhat coldly.

"One can see that these good folks look unkindly on me in spite of their *vivats*," he whispered to Ingaretha as he led her indoors, pale and trembling with emotion.

"They will love you in time," she said; "remember that you are a stranger and a foreigner, whilst they have known me as a little child. Have patience, dear René, and all will be well."

He kissed her hand fervently, and made no answer. Hand in hand they wandered about the beautiful old house, avoiding the merry-making crowd out of doors. For by four o'clock another feast took place on the lawn, namely, that of the school children, and after a quiet hour of demolishing cakes and goodies, the red-faced, joyous little multitude, all clad in gay new garments of Ingaretha's finding, dispersed about the park, bent upon pleasure. Throughout the afternoon of that memorable day René and Ingaretha were left much to themselves. Their guests were occupied with the good things provided for them. Carew and his friends were occupied with the all-absorbing masque.

In quiet, happy tones, the lovers talked of many familiar things. All rapture had passed away, a great quietude possessed them.



"HURRAH! HURRAH! LONG LIVE OUR LADY!"

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Alike forgotten and forgetting for a brief space, soul approached soul in supreme communion of perfect love. They planned out such a future as should be good both for themselves and the world. In childlike humility and childlike trust, they looked forward to the aspirations after what seemed to them the highest good and the fulfilment of their dearest wishes.

They decided to go to America, not five years hence, nor five months, nor even five weeks, but in five days; so impetuous were they to school themselves in the art of social reform. They would see with their own eyes this New World which by common consent was allowed to be the teacher of the Old—this Arcadia of fact, not of fiction, in which 'et nos in Arcadia fuimus,' should greet them broadly spoken with Yankee brogue. And what they learned in this practical paradise should be zealously turned to account on their return home.

Meantime, in Carew's house a gorgeous scene was being enacted. The masqueraders, among whom were Monsieur and Madame Sylvestre, Ghenilda, Amy and her elder children, Maddio and Aglaë, assembled in the green-room for a final revision of their toilettes, Carew as umpire. Fantastic and beautiful clothes make children of us all. On the occasion in question wealth in abundance, and good taste, poetic faculty, moreover, were summoned to fête Ingaretha's wedding with becoming splendour; and the success was perfect. Where did all the treasures come from on a sudden massed together? Which of Ingaretha's friends had 'ransacked the ocean for orient pearl?' Which had cunningly picked out such marvellous silks from the lumber of an Algerian or Cairene bazaar? The eye was dazzled, the imagination fired, the pulse quickened by this great display. For besides the sparkle of diamond and ruby, the refulgence of pearl and opal, here were Persian embroideries heavy with gold, mantles and robes of those indescribable Eastern colours, greens, purples, yellows, which reach the acmé of gorgeousness without the slightest tinge of commonplace. Not an inch of inartistic stuff would Carew permit, though some of the ladies all but went on their knees before him, begging for their favourite bit of crude pink or blue gauze. Carew, pliant on all other points, stood firm as a rock to his theory, and would not abrogate one of his harsh decrees. Theatrical vulgarities must be discarded, or he would throw up the whole thing.

After a good deal of skirmishing, therefore,

he had his way with admirable results. Standing in the midst of the radiantly dressed gods and goddesses, nymphs, nereids, fauns and elves, that kept flocking from inner chambers, he dispensed additional favours, such as rich exotics, golden wands, silver trumpets, and other choice embellishments.

At the stroke of four something like order took possession of this 'fairy rabblement.' The ladies flew one way, the men another, the children transformed into elves and miniature bogeys scuttled into the nursery, and the clatter of tea-cups, and the aroma of cigars, proclaimed their several occupations.

All this time the great hall was filling. There was a flutter of fans, a buzz of admiring voices, a scramble for the best places, till the music began. Then Ingaretha stole to her place with René at her side, both smiling and nodding to their assembled friends. A bell tinkled, the music ceased, and the curtain drew up amid acclamations of delight at the opening scene of Carew's MASQUE OF YE GOLDEN AGE.

CHAPTER XLVIII.—THE EVE OF THE WEDDING (CONTINUED).

THE glittering pageant had come to an end. Gradually, as the purple and gold of an autumn sunset, all the gorgeousness melted away in the great hall, leaving it dusk, silent, deserted. The musicians, bird-like, chirped a final note ere putting away their instruments. Actors and audience dispersed for a little repose before the crowning piece of hospitality—namely, the banquet—should take place. Carew retreated to the one corner in his own house where he felt at home, namely, the music-room, and there received the compliments of three or four real admirers. Ingaretha was there, and Euphrosyné, and Amy Greenfield; perhaps the three persons out of that vast assemblage who could best appreciate what had made his poetic effort the glowing, moving, enchanting thing it was. For these three women were all in the secret of the passion that had prompted so lovely a homage, and mingled with their praises was a pitying tenderness he, and he only, could perceive.

He smiled graciously, acknowledging their approval, but feeling sick at heart. From that day forth hope would not exist for him, and without hope could even the life of an artist be endurable? This beautiful and adored Ingaretha would to-morrow no longer be sovereign lady of his, would step down from the throne of his heart, would

break her sceptre of empire and reign over another kingdom. He hardly knew how he answered her questions, how he met her kind glances, how he so far mastered himself in that supreme hour of misery as not to shock her by a wild word or gesture. But he did master himself. His looks, his words, his actions belonged to him, and never once swerved from a cold, sad, soul-stricken dignity. Poor Carew!

Light-hearted as a happy lover, Monsieur Sylvestre, having received abundance of

pretty speeches, sought out René, and begged his company for a walk.

"I am bound to fetch a song from Pilgrim's Hatch, that I promised to sing to thy Ingaretha," he said, "and in the hurry of departure forgot it. Put on thy hat, dear fellow, and go there with me. A three-mile walk will do thee no harm this divine summer night; and it is the last chance we shall have of talking familiarly for who knows how long?"

René obeyed. The two slipped out un-



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observed—Monsieur Sylvestre still wearing the garb of his rôle, namely, a golden mantle and purple robe, and holding in his hand a magician's rod. They set off at a brisk pace.

What a never-to-be-forgotten night it was! starry, dewy, melodious. In Carew's park the nightingales were singing joyful epithalamiums, through the thickets thrilled the passionate notes, following them wherever they went. Glowworms shone like altar flames here and there; light clouds passed over fields of stars; the stately shadows of forest trees lay across little lawny glades, whence the

fawns scuttled away at sound of their footsteps. Sweet breaths of wild-rose and freshly-mown hay were blown here and there. Except for the light footstep of fleeing fawns, and the songs of the nightingales, all was still.

Monsieur Sylvestre trod the ground as airily as conquering hero who is followed by music, banners, and the trophies of victory. He could not control the ecstasy which had taken possession of him. He sang snatches of happy songs, whistled, laughed, jested.

René was almost sad. His companion's self-abandonment irritated, hurt him. How

could they be sure that Ingaretha in choosing him was choosing the right casket? Gradually the old man yielded to the sobering influence, and talked of serious things. A minor chord was struck, and the two voices for a time ran harmoniously together.

"Be not discouraged, my son, if during the first few years of thy marriage, the responsibilities of thy new position weigh heavily upon thee. Trust thy wife's goodness without stint or spare, and put her happiness and thy own after the great world-reviving ideas of which it is thy chiefest happiness to be propagandist. Let nothing daunt thee, neither the prejudices of thy new social medium, nor undue care for the material safety of those nearest and dearest, nor mistaken susceptibilities with regard to worldly things. For what is all this treasure of which thy mistress is possessor but dross, till it be transmuted by the touch of the reformer? Have a care, therefore, lest from a pardonable, although most dangerous sensitiveness, thou missest the golden opportunities pressed upon thee by the gods."

Finding that René was silent, the old man continued in more stirring tones—

"Now, indeed, is Socialism in our own persons glorified and exalted! Now, indeed, is the time to prove worthy sons of a lavish and heretofore ill-used mother. In this thy union with a rich and noble lady I see the beginning of a better time, the dawn of a bright fulfilment, but the time and this fulfilment will both be abortions, unless thou by thy own strength shall bring about such desirable issues. By the sacred name of our great leader Fourier, by other names held by us all to be adorable, by thy inward conviction of our incomparable calling, I conjure thee to be true to thy behest, unflinching as an inquisitor, self-sacrificing as a devotee, courageous as a pioneer in the quest of new worlds, march on, O heir of a world regenerate, to supreme victory and supreme perfection!"

"Oh!" said René, thoughtfully and sadly. "You forget that I love Ingaretha, and that I cannot help putting her happiness before everything. Any other honourable man would feel the same."

"But I perceive plainly enough that her happiness lies with that very ambition to which I am urging thee," continued the other eagerly. "What is it that she loves in her husband? Not any model of stereotyped behaviour, not any echo of common excellences and endeavours, not any shadow of another man's self, but a bold, brave, original

thinker and doer, bearing the fresh stamp of nature's mint." He placed a hearty hand upon the young man's shoulder, and added, "Heaven bless thee, René, and keep all such sophistries leagues remote from thee. Ingaretha's happiness forsooth! As if a good woman's happiness did not at all times lie in the accomplishment of her husband's fondest wishes! And our Ingaretha is no ordinary soul. Her convictions have gone with us from the beginning, and there is no sacrifice that may not be expected of so noble and impulsive a nature."

"What am I that I should assume to myself the government of her affairs?" said René earnestly. "Her support, her advice, her ideas I will receive thankfully in furtherance of our cause, but the renunciation of her heritage, never."

Monsieur Sylvestre tossed his head more in scorn than vexation.

"My son," he said, in the sweetest tones of his sweet voice, "were I to believe that in marrying Ingaretha thou contemplatest, even for a moment, the subordination of supreme destiny to petty duties, I should weep for the backsliding of our once staunch supporter. But I no more believe in thy retrogression than I believe in Ingaretha's willing surrender of the beautiful and the divine for the gross and short-lived. No, I see clearly before me, and never was my spirit more completely clothed with the mantle of prophecy, the magnificent future in store for us all, and in us all, for humanity. This grand and lovely creature—thy wife from tomorrow—is henceforth to be the Eumenid, the grace-giving, feud-dissolving Fate of the two great divisions of society—the rich and the poor—the splendid and the forlorn—the blissful and the wretched. By her unspeakably good and tender ministrations, for the first time in blessed England, will be laid the stone of the happy state and the perfect society. For I see that the chief problem of our time is to be solved only by those magical words—the equal right of every man to the soil; and it is for you and Ingaretha to sacrifice yourselves for the common good. Look ye well to it! For myself, and those who are of my generation, the good infantine-hearted Maddio, the devoted, high-souled Euphrosyne, remains but the sowing of the seed which is to bear such glorious fruit. Night infinite—I should rather say, day eternal—is dawning, and our own work in the old familiar world is nearly done; nor do we repine, so long as our children"—here his voice trembled—"spiritual

sons and daughters, continue the work. Promise me thou wilt not fail us when we are moved out of sight and hearing for ever."

"Nay, do not press vows upon me," René answered, much moved. "I will never prove a traitor to the cause of the people. That I promise you, but how can I pledge myself to more? To live an unworthy life by the side of a woman like Ingaretha were impossible. We must both trust her, and all is sure to be well."

"Would I could change places with thee!" cried the old man in a sudden burst of ecstasy. "Young, beautiful, the bridegroom of the sweetest woman under the sun, and not only the sweetest, but the loveliest, the

world, large as it is, would hardly contain my exulting soul; and even now I could leap, laugh, and crow like a year-old manikin, out of sheer joy at thy good fortune. Why art thou so sober? If ever a man had reason to rejoice, it is thyself."

René did not answer. Monsieur Sylvestre, whose frolicsome mood seemed enhanced by his fantastic habiliments, began to sing and wave his golden wand to the tune :—

"Allons, enfant du prolétaire,
Pour qui naîsse un siècle meilleur,
Arbore la double bannière
De poète et de travailleur,
Comme Amphion, gloire immortelle !
Viens avec nous et bâtissons,
Les murs de la cité nouvelle,
Au bruit des marteaux, des chaneaux,
Frappons,
Chantons," &c.



PART XI.

CHAPTER XLIX.—THE EVE OF THE WEDDING
(CONTINUED).

S Monsieur Sylvestre and René passed out of the park-gate into the high-road leading through the hamlet of Pease-marsh, they were conscious of something unusual going on there. From the top of the village street to the

bottom did not measure more than a few hundred yards, and yet, during this short and ordinarily uneventful way, there were to-night encountered many strange and, it might have seemed, portentous sights and sounds, but that on the eve of Ingaretha's wedding nothing of evil omen could surely take place! The lantern hanging over the door of the Barleycorn Inn, half-way down the street, showed them stray figures furtively making for the road, doors were opened and shut in consternation, snatches of excited talk reached their ears from a distance, whilst, instead of cheery "Good night" or "Fine evening" from the passers-by, an ominous silence was preserved towards them. One drunkard cursed them as he reeled past. An ill-favoured-looking lad came to his father's garden-gate, uttered an opprobrious yell, and then ran back again. Two women standing on neighbouring door-steps whispered loudly, in malicious tones, "There they go, good luck to 'em!" The honest old tollgate-keeper answered their friendly greeting with a hard stare.

"The good Ingaretha's wine has fairly addled the understandings of these simple folks," Monsieur Sylvestre said. "But I am not inclined to look upon an occasional excess as otherwise than beneficial to ordinary human nature, cramped as it is by daily routine. After a second or third occasion of

this kind, they would learn to conduct themselves with the elevation becoming a great event."

Another drunkard reeled by.

"To-morrow will see the reaction of such unaccustomed debauch," continued Monsieur. "Dressed in their Sunday garments, and wearing a solemn aspect befitting so august an occasion, we shall see these besotted revellers changed into decorous and sensitive beings. The ceremony of thy wedding with their lady Ingaretha, will touch their hearts and electrify their intellects like a miracle."

A third drunkard fell heavily against them in the darkness. They put him tenderly on his legs again and proceeded.

They had now left the village behind them, and reached a stile from which a pathway leading along two meadows led to Pilgrim's Hatch. Beside them, as they went, flowed amid plummy sallows a little river, thickly overgrown with reed and rush, and perfumed with willow herb, meadow-sweet, and marsh valerian. The old man bent down and bathed his hands and brow in the cool water.

"I too have drunk a little more wine than is my habit," he said; "but how good and reviving is the luscious draught poured out by sweet hands! In love of Ingaretha I would not mind how often I thus freely indulged myself. As sings the divine Béranger—

*"Le vin charme tous les esprits,
Qu'on le donne
Par toane."*

Just then a loud noise was heard, half ominous, half exultant, that could be called neither a shriek nor a growl, but was something made up of both; a vague roar of many human voices, a wave of angry sound dashed against the silent walls of night. Almost simultaneously a vivid light blazed out from the hollow. The two men stood still, gazed, listened, held their breath.

"Some homestead burns! It is close by thy dwelling. My father! Pilgrim's Hatch is fired!" cried René, catching his companion's hand.

"Nay," answered Monsieur Sylvestre, smiling, though his knees had trembled at the fateful, and, alas! but too familiar sight. "I cannot believe that there are devils at work at this propitious hour. A hay-rick, perhaps, has been set on fire by its inward heat. Small misfortunes farmers must expect such sultry weather as this. Well, let us hasten forward and see for ourselves."

They set off running at a nimble pace, and every step proclaimed the awful truth but too plainly. Pilgrim's Hatch was blazing. To blind men there would have been ample signs of such a catastrophe in the tramp of hurrying feet, the rushing wind, the unwonted glare of the heavens, the sudden crash and sudden pause, the ebb and flow of the fiery current, the human awe expressed alike by the noise and silence of the spectators, the cries of frightened beasts, the indescribable commotion made up of all.

René and Monsieur Sylvestre were now in the midst of the cruel, heart-breaking scene; for no sooner had they leaped the little fence dividing the meadows from the orchards and stackyard of Pilgrim's Hatch than the whole truth broke upon them. Among the handful of lookers-on they had not a single friend. These half-drunken or wholly drunken men and lads, these yelling women and girls, were come hither, not to help them in their hour of need, after brotherly and sisterly fashion, but under the most diabolical leadership to work any mischief that opportunity offered. Among the quietest folds are sure to be one or two black sheep, and in this harmless, homely populace, evil counsellors, backed up by debauch and malice, were raging with tiger-like fury. They would show these accursed foreigners, forsooth, whether they could do as they liked with good-living people. Who knew what wickednesses against God and man were propagated in their so-called Phalanstery? and if they had bewitched the first lady in the land into making a disgraceful marriage, what might not happen next?

When the very best behaved and most intelligent of the village folk were fairly beside themselves with puzzlement and mortification, little else but evil behaviour was to be looked for from the ill-favoured and the blockheads. Be that as it may, mischief had been set afoot somehow; and, once set afoot, there were not wanting aiders and abettors of it. Is there not a madman in us all? as some writer has said.

In the twinkling of an eye the two men were waked from dreams delicious to agonizing reality. The sweet, starry night, with fragrance of wild flowers and gentle ripple of brooklet, and thoughts of their beautiful Ingareth, were clean gone—swept away, absorbed into a gloomy, disastrous limbo, without any beauty or pitying look of love. They were alone, two stray angels in hell were not lonelier; and they knew well enough, no need for a trumpet to proclaim

it, that not a hand would be raised to help them in this their hour of direst necessity.

"Mount our good Jack, and ride to St. Beowulf's for the engine!" cried Monsieur Sylvestre; "yet stay, our poor beasts must first be placed in safety. Surely some one will help us. Ho, there! Josh, Sam, Ebenezer, will you desert your old friend on the eve of your lady's wedding? Water, bring water, for Miss Meadowcourt's sake!"

He stepped forth boldly amid the besotted crew, looking as fantastic a figure as the imagination can conceive, in his long purple mantle, golden girdle, and jewelled cap. Standing in the full flash of the conflagration, he waved aloft his magician's rod, face and figure glowing with unspeakably weird majesty.

There was a hush of clamouring voices and hurrying feet, a momentary feeling or instinct of awe, then a mad cry ran through the hall-tipsy rabble, and the fire was forgotten.

As if by preconcerted signal—though most likely the attack, or, at least, the mode of it, was entirely unpremeditated—two or three of the ringleaders rushed upon the still unsuspecting old man.

"The wizard! the wizard!" cried one, and the cry was caught up by the rest. "Water, water for the wizard!"

In another moment the magician waved his wand, head erect, arms raised, figure calm and grandly posed, but for a moment only. Now he totters, now he drops his staff, now he falls. René, horror-stricken, rushes to the rescue. In vain. What can two men, one old, the other enfeebled by months of prison, do against so many? Struggling faintly in the rude embraces of his tormentors, Monsieur Sylvestre is borne to the little horse-pond he had loved so well, is thrust once, twice, thrice, into the rank water, amid loud laughter and cheers, is held down where the reeds and rushes grow thickest, buffeted, pelted, cruelly, knavishly, dishonourably handled, that starry, hitherto sweet summer night.

René turns upon the assailants like a madman, as he feels and, for the nonce, is indeed. He flings a few fiery words at the crowd. They pay no more heed than to shout derisively, "The bridegroom, do ye hear! the bridegroom! the bridegroom!"

"Cowards! villains! how dare ye?" he cried between his teeth; and, finding words of so little use, tries what blows can do. Wondrously enough—for after that long term of semi-existence in prison, his strength was

not great—he hurls one burly giant to the ground, attacks another harder to deal with, then is set upon by several; blow succeeds blow; the combatants grow desperate; blows flow freely; René, able to fight no longer, whether well or ill, hears a last sound from his comrade ere he too succumbs.

The melodious voice, though faint, penetrates that hateful din, and reaches poor René, comforting him a little—if anything could comfort him!

"They are still our brothers . . . forgive . . . forgive!"

CHAPTER L.—A GHOSTLY BANQUET.

MR. CAREW began to wonder what had become of his guests when eleven o'clock struck and neither Monsieur Sylvestre nor René made their appearance. The banquet was ready. The guests grew impatient. The bride waited in her chamber to pass into the hall, not red as a rose now, but pale as a lily. Would this long summer day never come to an end? she thought, weary alike of pain and pleasure.

During the last twelve hours she had gone through emotions enough to tire out the bravest woman under the sun; and then to-morrow the emotions were to begin again! To bid farewell to her maiden life, so sweet, so free, so dear to many, was not easy. To enter upon a new career with this man, so adored, admired, trusted, pitied, was not more easy. She could count upon his faith and his integrity; she knew that she need never dread the last affront to a true woman, namely, a changeful love; but there were other things that might come to pass, hardly less bitter. She could not help seeing, with the exquisite instinct of her sex, how, in spite of his own tact and discretion, in spite of reticence and self-sacrifice on her part, a certain disenchantment was possible.

These foreshadowings, vague as noontide cirri, floated across the mind of our poor weeping, smiling glad, sorry Ingaretha. Oh, would that the day were over, and the year, and five years! so that, the worst and best alike being known, she and René might live evenly, neither too much hoping, nor too much fearing!

She could not understand why no summons came for the banquet, and moved about impatiently; now altering the flower in her hair; now changing her shawl, her jewels; now frowning at herself in the glass. Why looked she so pale and weary, when it behoved her to be beautiful, above all other occasions in life? thought Ingaretha.

She heard a voice in the outer room, which was Ghenilda's boudoir, a man's voice, and yet not René's. Strange! Taking up her handkerchief, jewelled fan, and bouquet of white roses, she passed out.

It was Carew. He stood at the door of the little sitting-room, importuning the maid for a word with Miss Meadowcourt.

"Come in," said the sweetest of all the voices then sounding through Wilbye Hall. "Are we never to have any supper and go home, Mr. Carew?"

He came forward, shut the door upon the indignant maid, then stood irresolute, not knowing where to begin. His manner troubled her, so strangely tender it was, so wholly unlike the calm, almost stately manner he had observed towards her throughout that eventful day.

What has happened?

Her face asked the question without a word. A new paleness, not of weariness, but of inquietude, overspread cheeks and brow. The queenly figure trembled. The noble head drooped. The little hands shook.

"Something most unexpected has happened," Carew answered, with all the cheerfulness he could assume. "Don't be frightened."

Then he got out the ugly words as best he could.

"Pilgrim's Hatch has been set on fire. I must go and give what help I can."

"And René and Monsieur Sylvestre?" asked Ingaretha quickly.

"They are there; but from all I can learn the village-folk are drunk, and are making a row, so that I fear they can do but little. I will go at once——"

Still he stayed, held back by Ingaretha's beseeching look. She began to speak, stopped short, began again, and, for the second time, failed. Misgiving after misgiving crossed her mind during that short deliberation. A fire on the eve of her wedding day! The villagers drunk and disorderly! Monsieur Sylvestre and René alone and unaided amidst such a scene! All these facts put together looked ominous! Could it be that the unpopularity of her marriage had brought about such a catastrophe? She put away the hateful thought, and motioned Carew to go.

"Never mind the guests and the supper," she said, trying to smile, though he could see that her eyes were full of tears. "Go to them as fast as you can."

"And what will you do?" he asked, loth to relinquish the intoxicating task of counsellor. "Stay here with Ghenilda and the children."

"Why should I not return to the Abbey?" she answered, finding fresh cause for terror in every word. "My servants are surely sober?"

"Yes; but Wilbye is so much nearer to Pilgrim's Hatch than the Abbey, that you will hear news twice as soon by staying here."

Carew did not urge the real reason, namely, that if all was true he had just heard, she might encounter painful sights on the way. But she saw plainly enough that in spite of that quiet request, he was ready to go on his knees on behalf of the petition.

"It will be much better for you to stay with my sister. Do believe me when I say so," he added quite plaintively, and she consented.

"I will do anything you like, if you only go," she said in a half peremptory, half pleading voice. And without a word or look he was gone.

The maid, at a sign, shut the door upon her lonely lady and went away. In a few minutes Ghenilda rushed in to give Ingaretha, as she thought, a little courage and a good many kisses.

"My darling, my darling," she cried, "could anything have been more unlucky? A bridal feast without either bride or bridegroom! But why don't they eat the supper first and put out the fire afterwards? Well, I am frightfully hungry, so good-bye."

She ran back to put in her pretty head and say—

"I will send up something for you to eat, or bring it, if that would tempt you more. Don't fret yourself, sweetest. I am sure Carew need not have gone, nor the others either. A fire is soon put out, and there are always proper people to do unpleasant things."

With that she went away, her exhilaration at the success of the *fiat* undaunted by what seemed a very secondary misfortune. The guests accepted her high spirits as a permission themselves to be unconcerned, and except for Euphrosyne's pitifully resigned face, no one would have supposed that anything unusual had happened. Maddio left his seat as soon as Ghenilda's explanation was made. Among that crowd of gorgeously dressed merry-makers Euphrosyne felt herself terribly alone. She was fain to fly to Ingaretha, but dared not. The splendour of satins and rubies seemed a mockery more bitter than she could bear. To her, also, this momentous day seemed interminable.

When at last the banquet ended, and the millinery-laden carriages rolled away one by one, she crept noiselessly to Ingaretha's

door, longing, yet not daring to enter. Once she knocked feebly, but no answer came. Then she went away, hiding herself in some quiet corner.

Meantime, Ingaretha was trying to coax time into speed somehow. She took up one book after the other, but the words bore no meaning. She walked backwards and forwards till the reflection of her own shadow in the looking-glass grew unbearable. She lighted a fire, in a momentary shiver of cold, then threw open the window, feeling as suddenly overwhelmed with heat. Flowers were on the table of the outer room, and wine and food, but the roses had no fragrance, the wine tasted bitter, the bread and meat nauseous. Was there nothing she could do to pass away this terrible interval of suspense?

The thought of Euphrosyne was not absent from her mind; but though Euphrosyne had never been dearer to her than now, though she had forgiven her from her heart and conscience long ago, she could not summon enough courage to seek her sympathy now. There is a coquetry in the sad as well as the joyful emotions. Men and women coyly refrain from and resist the comfort of their beloved ones, as youths and maidens withhold the long-sought-for sign of adoration and favour.

It was long past midnight when Ingaretha heard a quick footstep under her window. By this time the house had grown quiet, and she started up, thinking that Carew, or René, or some messenger had come. But the sound, instead of advancing, grew fainter and fainter, and soon died away.

It was Madame Sylvestre, who, unable any longer to endure suspense, had started off on foot and alone for Pilgrim's Hatch. The exploit to her was a trifle. In far-off *Alsace* she had performed many a one more difficult and hazardous. But in Ghenilda's household she knew that such an act would be an extraordinary precedent, and she waited therefore till she could slip out unobserved. After this little incident a long interval of perfect silence occurred. Cold, worn out, and sick at heart, Ingaretha was dreaming nightmare dreams on the sofa when a soft tap at the door caused her to wake up with a cry.

Carew had come back alone.

CHAPTER LI.—CAREW'S TIDINGS.

Was it indeed Carew, or the mere semblance of what had so lately been his gracious, serene, harmonious self? Bespattered with mud, deathly pale, agonized, dismayed, he

looked more like some weatherbeaten, sorely-tried campaigner, than gentle poet bound on fair lady's bidding. So ghastly indeed was the news written on the unwonted disorder of his person and discomfiture of his face, that Ingaretha's first impulse was to draw back horrified. But the sound of her name uttered by the pleasant, familiar voice, and the look of sympathy shed upon her by well-known, kindly eyes, recalled her to herself; she came near him, and stood still, calmly awaiting whatever news he had to give.

The momentary radiance that overspread Carew's features as he met that pathetic look of appeal passed away. With almost a convulsive movement, he withdrew into the shadow, so that she might not see the misery written on his face. Then he dropped into a chair from sheer exhaustion. Ingaretha brought him a glass of water. He drank it like a man maddened with thirst. And the draught gave him strength to speak.

"I have brought you no good news," he said, with a ghastly smile. "It is all much worse than we thought."

"Where are Monsieur Sylvestre and René?" asked Ingaretha, looking straight at him with her large sad blue eyes.

"Oh, wait!" said Carew, with a look of indescribable wretchedness. "Let me begin at the beginning. How can I tell you?"

"Was Pilgrim's Hatch set on fire by our own people?" she asked, trembling in every limb. "Are they two safe?" she dared not ask now.

"It is monstrous—savage—diabolical!" he went on, almost wildly, "that on the eve of your wedding-day such a crime should be committed!"

He rose from his seat, took a turn in the room, then sat down again, covering his face with his hands.

"Were they two hurt—René and Monsieur Sylvestre?" asked Ingaretha, still maintaining outward composure. For Carew's sake, she was striving after self-mastery. His intense horror at whatever had happened, his pathetic endeavour to spare her, his almost childlike dilatoriness, were gradually preparing her for something very terrible.

At last she faltered out, averting her face:—

"There is no one else to tell me but you: of what use to wait?"

True enough. There was no one else to tell her but he, and the longer he waited, the harder became his task. He drew a deep sigh, and determined to have done with it, with hope, with happiness, with anything.

Life seemed a burden since Ingaretha's heart was to be broken.

"They are both hurt," he began—"so much hurt, indeed, that there is little hope." Then he gasped out, "God help you, poor child, they are dead!"

Whatever was Christianly, brotherly, manly, you may be sure Carew said to the sweet thing sobbing at his feet, imploring with bitter tears for some other news than this. "It cannot, cannot be!" she wailed. "Tell me it is not so! Take me to them! I know they are not dead!" and with other wild speeches, she clung to him, knelt to him, like a suppliant for the grace he could not give.

He ran to Ghenilda, thinking that in such an hour of supreme sorrow a woman's comfort might be best. And Ghenilda did what she could, though a very helpless little thing in times of trouble. She sobbed on Ingaretha's neck, and kissed her friend a dozen times, and coaxed her after babyish fashion into going to bed. Then she lay down by her side, put her arms around her, and babbled forth innumerable phrases of endearment. "Carew will tell you all in the morning," she said, parrying Ingaretha's question. "Don't let us cry ourselves ill," and so on; Ingaretha accepting her condolences passively and gratefully.

Whilst Ghenilda prattled on, thought after thought, each a physical torment, passed through her brain. What would become of Euphrosyne—poor, poor Euphrosyne? What was the use of sunshine without Monsieur Sylvestre to enjoy it? What was she to do with all the treasures stored up for René? Youth, happiness, hope had waited for him in vain, and now all seemed worthless. Oh! if she could only have made him happy for a year, for a little year, she could have renounced the rest. Who had done this cruel thing? And why had it been done?

Carew had withheld as many of the painful details as he could, but the truth stood out, stark, appalling, ghastly. Monsieur Sylvestre had been murdered, and René, in attempting to rescue him, had met his death-blow, whether intentional or no, seemed to alter the fact very little. Oh! the horror of it, the horror of it! she moaned, the fair head tossing wildly, the golden locks deluged with tears. Oh, the horror of it! and then she would shrink from the isolation she had sought, and fling herself into Ghenilda's arms.

"Don't think of the wickedness," Ghenilda said. "It is enough to have the sorrow; who knows but that it may have been mere

accident after all? Carew may have misunderstood, or the people may have been too frightened to know what they said. Try to sleep, dearest. Now, don't you think if I brought little Micheldever into bed and put him in your arms, it would comfort you? Never were arms so soft as his, and he looks so pretty in his little nightgown, and he will kiss you and pet you. Yes, I must fetch him."

Ingaretha had no fancy for the child's arms around her just then. She felt suffocated already, but of course Ghenilda had her way. The end of it was that the little boy, not liking to be taken from his lordly crib, screamed and kicked so violently that he was sent away. Ghenilda retired to her dressing-room to send off telegrams to China, and Ingaretha got some quiet. Would day never come, she thought one moment! and the next, if only night and silence and darkness would remain to her for ever and ever! What had she to do with sunshine and singing any more? Life had turned its back upon her, hitherto smiling, seductive, so dearly loved life! It seemed as if no friend were left in heaven or earth to poor widowed, orphaned Ingaretha. For years she had been striving to do her very best with the destiny intrusted to her, shaping it tenderly, breathing over it softly, praying, hoping, aspiring, and just when something like the ideal began to shine through the clay, came a thunder-clap, smiting both worker and image. She could never, never, begin the work again. Where she had fallen, there she must lie till friendly death should beckon.

CHAPTER LII.—EUPHROSYNE'S VISION.

UNDER the clear light of stars Euphrosyne set out in quest of evil fortune. She had cast aside her splendid festive robe, not without a certain melancholy feeling of satisfaction. All through the day, the incongruity existing between her real and fictitious self—the first so full of gloomy foreboding, the second so gay and gala-like, had been present with her, and now the two were severed, a voice within whispered, For ever!

She passed through the park at a brisk pace, following the path that her husband and Kené had taken a few hours before. Sad as she was, and unquiet as she was, the divine beauty of the summer night touched her spirit with self enchantment. More than once a prayer escaped her lips. To whom did she pray? To the great creative Spirit of the universe? To the solitary star that lingered, as if out of sympathy with her

sorrow? To the perfume of close-shut flowers? To the exquisite hues that heralded the day? To the day itself, that dawned at last, lovely, peaceful, gracious? She knew not. She only prayed, and the act comforted her.

As she trudged along the open road, a loud noise of wheels and horses' feet broke the stillness. It came nearer and nearer. She shrank into the hedge, for it seemed as if vehicle and horses would make way for no one. It was the St. Beowulf fire-brigade, hastening towards Pilgrim's Hatch.

A little while after, she heard a steady sound of tramping footsteps, and again she hid herself in the friendly shadow of the hedge. This time it was a company of six policemen, who were also making the best of their way towards the fire, dropping ominous words as they went.

She hastened forward, but her strength failed her strangely. She felt held back, as if in a dream, by some supernatural, implacable power. Now her knees trembled; now her feet stumbled; now she was impelled into a wrong path; now into a miry place. Of all her journeys made on foot this was surely the most disastrous. Yet how fair and peaceful was this summer dawn!

The mist vanished from the meadows. The grey earth was gradually warmed with tender light, the birds began to twitter and chirp, the insects ecstatically hummed everywhere. The beautiful life and activity of nature had begun afresh.

She trudged on, till at last she came within a few hundred yards of Pilgrim's Hatch. A thrill passed through her at the thought of encountering her husband. Was he brave enough to bear up against this crowning misfortune? If his spirit quailed now, what could she do to comfort him?

She sat down, almost fainting with suspense. As yet the place was not in sight, and she could only foretell what had happened by strange sounds and dimly-outlined sights, weird, unfamiliar, prophetic. For instance, a little pet calf trotted past her, moaning helplessly. Where was its dam, and what terror had driven the hapless being hither alone? Again, the cart-horses had got out of the stable, and were standing at the meadow-gate, with a human look of desolation and homelessness. Then there was an unwonted clucking of fowls and squeaking of pigs; authoritative cries of unknown voices in command; disastrous sounds; solemn pauses, suffocating smells of burning wood and straw—signs innumer-



"THE SPECTACLE PASSED ON."

able of the great calamity, the full measure of which she had come to learn.

Whilst resting thus, overwhelmed physically and morally with a crushing sense of her woes and helplessness, one of two things must have happened. Either she slept, and in her dreams saw, as not infrequently happens in times of acute emotion, the vivid semblance of the invisible reality—in other words, she was conscious of what took place without knowing it; or, and the one case is as likely as the other, she saw what was real and tangible, and mistook it for the phantasmagoria of dreams. Be this as it may, what she saw whilst she sat thus, mute, motionless, electrified, was this:—

Four men came by, bearing on their shoulders a burden that glittered in the sharp morning light. Kingly, imperial, almost god-like was the figure, lying so softly on rude improvised bier, arms folded, head resting softly, limbs in decent and decorous repose, the silken locks of white hair gently stirred by the first breeze of day. Golden mantle and purple robe fluttered a little, but otherwise all was still and grand. Who had died in this remote Suffolk village of such majestic stature, such unparalleled beauty, that the whole place seemed magnified, sanctified, deified by the presence of the dead!

Euphrosyne rose from her seat and sprang forward, crying: "My husband, my life!" then fell back in a swoon. The spectacle passed on. A second time came four men hastily forwards, bearing on their shoulders a helpless burden, not enveloped gorgeously like the first, but noteworthy nevertheless. René, so beautiful in life, had gained no ugliness in death, rather a marble-like tranquillity, and look of resignation, that in life had been wanting.

A little crowd of women and children followed in the rear. One kindly creature fell back and ministered to the poor, horror-struck, paralysed thing lying by the roadside.

When Euphrosyne recovered herself the sun had risen, and in the full light of it stood a familiar figure. Mr. Minifie, for it was he, had alighted from his horse, fastening it to a tree opposite, on purpose to see what could be done for her. He was a hard, unsympathetic man, and doubtless, if the truth were made clear, rejoiced inwardly that punishment had overtaken these mischief-makers; nay, to his influence might be traced the bad feelings that had brought about such a murderous catastrophe. Yet he was moved by

the spectacle of Euphrosyne's desolation so far as to offer the best consolation at hand.

"Come along with me," he said, lifting her not ungently from the ground. "My wife shall put you to bed and do for you as if you were a sucking baby. What's the use of waiting here all by yourself? your grand friends have got enough to think about. Come along."

The last coarse touch, though well meant, decided her to accept his offer. Yes, true enough, Ingaretha and Mr. Carew had enough to trouble them without her, and Mrs. Minifie was an angel of kindness, in spite of her half-crazed ways. She got up, but strength failed her, and Mr. Minifie saw that to get her to the farm on foot was impossible. So a cart-horse tumbril was fetched, and into it, helpless as a baby, was put Euphrosyne, begging piteously, from time to time, to be taken to her husband. "Don't heed what she says," Mr. Minifie said to the driver. "The sooner we get the poor soul put to bed and give her something to quiet her the better, for we've enough to do to-day."

Euphrosyne listened trembling. What did he mean to give her? Absinthe, laudanum, or some anodyne more potent still? No, she would go on her knees to Mrs. Minifie rather than submit to that. They should find her submissive in all else, but she would never consent to forego the use of her senses at such a time.

If she only dared to fly to Ingaretha!

But no sooner had she crossed the threshold than the dreaded Mr. Minifie disappeared, and she knew well enough that from her hostess she had nothing to fear. At first it seemed as if Mrs. Minifie looked upon words as the only panacea for human woes. After talking without pause for the best part of an hour, she, however, began to bestir herself. A bed was got ready, some of her own scarecrow nightclothes were put upon unresisting Madame Sylvestre, food was brought, and utterly worn out with the suffering of the last few hours, she rested a little.

When an hour or two later Mr. Minifie came in, for once he was greeted with a pleasant look.

"I've done my best," she said. "She's quiet for a time."

"We've enough on our hands without looking after her," growled Mr. Minifie. "Give me something to eat."

"How scared you look!" Mrs. Minifie said.

"So would you if you had seen what I have seen," Mr. Minifie rejoined. "I

suppose two or three of 'em will hang for it."

"Of whom?" asked Mrs. Minifie, in her turn looking frightened.

"Do hold your tongue. When people put others out of the way, they generally hang for it, don't they?"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! the poor ignorant things. I don't believe they meant to do any mischief," said Mrs. Minifie, crying. "I hope our Joe and his brother Ebenezer arn't in the scrape."

"I wouldn't say they are or they ain't. It's a bad job for 'em all."

Mr. Minifie made a hearty breakfast without uttering another syllable. Mrs. Minifie sat on a low stool and cried till he fairly gave her to understand that she must either control herself or quit his delectable society. She then sat down and ate and drank also.

CHAPTER LIII.—CAREW EX-CATHEDRA.

COULD it be true? Had the day, begun so goldenly, ended in bitterness, in hatred, in death? Under this beneficent sun, on this smiling soil, had a tragedy been committed, fearful and blood-stained as any sung by the old Greek poets? Were this apparently matchless couple, boasting on the one hand of sweetness, stateliness, goodness, and beauty, on the other of fiery protelarian virtues, sorely-tried faith, passionate love of humanity, devotion to freedom, and other qualities wholly poetic and ideal, sundered by the most dreaded of the Fates, black-robed Atropos, armed with the fatal scissors?

Like a spectre dawned the day that was to have been the fairest of all the seasons—grey, cold, stricken with an inarticulate almost human dread. A creeping terror spread over the place, seizing alike the old man and the infant, the strong and the weak. On whose head would fall the fearful punishment of such fearful crime? There was not a family in the hamlet of Peasemarsch which had not good grounds for trembling in its shoes, since some member or other had been present at the fire.

But who had struck the first match and dealt the first blow?

Ay, there was the question that sent mothers, wives, and sweethearts flying to each other for comfort, advice, anything in the way of friendly words! All day long there was sobbing, wringing of the hands, and praying among the women; stupid, ill-concealed suspense and fear among the men. The end of the misery none could see. Of Ingaretha's sorrow few thought just then. At an early

hour the authorities of the place were astir—Mr. Whitelock, Mr. Stapleton, Mr. Minifie, and the churchwardens. Mr. Whitelock's first thought was Ingaretha. How would her haughty spirit bear this blow? Would she bow in meekness or hold up her head in defiance? He determined to see her if possible, and try once more to bend that proud will. She would surely not refuse to see the parish priest, the shepherd of those poor misguided sheep which had gone so far, so fearfully astray. There were obstacles which he had not taken into account. Ingaretha was Ghenilda's guest, and to be Ghenilda's guest was the same thing as to be Carew's. Both brother and sister knew well enough that for the present Mr. Whitelock's presence would be as unwelcome to their poor Ingaretha as frosts in May, and quietly, though firmly, resisted.

"Grievous, indeed, although I must admit well-merited, is the punishment that has overtaken my poor parish," began the rector. "I could but look for some signs of the divine displeasure, seeing how for the past year the people and those who set themselves up as their teachers offended not only the laws of social custom and the prejudices of right-minded conservatism, but, alas! the cardinal points of theological teaching. And now the innocent will suffer for the guilty."

"Oh, Mr. Whitelock!" cried Ghenilda, bursting into indignant tears, "how can you say that? The guilty are every one of those who had a hand in this horrid affair, and I hope they will all be severely punished. Not one should be spared—no, not one—if I were the judge."

"Mr. Whitelock is after all right, dear," Carew said, with sorrowful sarcasm. "The innocent will suffer for the guilty. These poor people 'knew not what they did.'"

"Of course one can but look upon them as passive instruments of heavenly judgment," continued the rector, not seeing the drift of Carew's meaning. "They must be undoubtedly brought to punishment; but in this case, seeing what fearful heresies through their agency have been uprooted, justice should surely be tempered with mercy. Why, a hundred or two hundred years back they would have been looked upon as benefactors of the Church and humanity."

Carew was silent.

Ghenilda's check flushed, but she too held her peace.

"Do not misjudge me, I pray you," the rector went on. "If I speak of the dead with undue severity, you must grant that I do not do so without grounds. We live in a

period perhaps the most critical the world has ever seen. Our beloved country, hitherto the stronghold of a State Church and monarchical government, is rapidly becoming leavened with free thought and republicanism. To avert the evil day, to stave off as long as may be the spread of free discussion and the ascendancy of the people, is all that is left to us—once a class honoured before all, now so despised that even the education of the poor is taken out of our hands! How can I, a minister of that holy Church,

an upholder of that time-honoured government, do otherwise than wage war against their enemies? And you must admit that of their enemies those two unhappy men were the most determined and implacable."

"I have no inclination to enter into a discussion about my poor friends' political or religious opinions," Carew answered. "I, for my part, appraise a man according to his character—and theirs were true, good, noble. Nothing will ever make me alter that opinion."



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"But they made a tool of Miss Meadowcourt—they despoiled her of her substance—they inveigled her into contracting a scandalous marriage—they made her turn her back upon her old friends—nay, they tempted her from the path of orthodoxy, of family tradition, I may say of social duty; and you call these men true, good, noble! What am I to think of such sentiments coming from a Churchman and a gentleman? My dear sir, pray do not allow your feelings to be carried thus far ahead of your reason."

"What is reason?" asked Carew bitterly.

"If it is unreasonable to weep for men like these, then I say blessed be unreason. Is it not enough that Ingaretha—Miss Meadowcourt—loved them? Could a woman like that love anything evil or impure? My blood boils at the merest suggestion of your words. Pray forgive me for saying so. Orthodoxy, family tradition, social duty! Heavens! is not Miss Meadowcourt something better than all these? Whatever she does must be good and beautiful; whatever she upholds, worthy and true. . . ."

"Miss Meadowcourt, no more than an

other daughter of Eve, is free from the taint of sin," the rector pursued; "and I trust she will be brought by these unhappy circumstances to see where she has done amiss. Had she listened to me in the first instance, the evil would have been averted; but, with the obstinacy of her sex, she pursued her own ways, and they have led her into this pitfall."

"And now the only thing we have to do is to comfort her as much as possible," Ghenilda said, looking significantly at Carew. He motioned her to go, saying, in a low voice, "We had better settle that matter without you, dear."

She went away, and then Carew began:—

"It is Miss Meadowcourt's earnest wish that her poor friends should both be buried in the churchyard of her parish. She has indicated the spot to me, and perhaps you will kindly let me show it to you."

Mr. Whitelock looked aghast.

"There are difficulties in the way, great difficulties. You forget that neither Monsieur Sylvestre nor his companion has been made eligible by holy baptism for Christian burial."

"If you object to perform that service, only signify your wishes at once," Carew said very coldly, "and we will find some one else to take your place."

"But there are other difficulties in the way . . ."—and the rector hesitated.

"Oh! why this waste of words?" Carew cried in an agony of impatience. "I thought the time was gone by when superstitions such as these enslaved the souls of men. Good God! Is not the spirit better than the symbol?—the soul of a thing better than its name? I know not what fits a human being for Christian burial, unless it be a good life. Cannot goodness take many shapes? and who shall say that their lives were not good?"

"Alas! alas! are we all mad?" cried the rector. "Who could have foreseen this terrible perversion? And amongst the most enlightened of my flock. Mr. Carew, it is impossible that we can reason together, feeling and judging, as we do, so diametrically opposite on vital points. Let us forbear further discussion for the present, lest, in undue

heat, we may say things we should afterwards be sorry for."

"With all my heart," Carew said.

They shook hands frigidly, and the rector went.

Carew shut himself in his room, and gave way to a passion of self-pitying, indignant, miserable thought.

"Oh," he said, "why have I undertaken duties for which I am no more fitted than a child?"

He was tender and patient as a woman, but lacked the faculty of doing disagreeable practical things in a happy way. This encounter with Mr. Whitelock might have ended very differently had his antagonist persuaded, coaxed, temporised. It would have been far more after Carew's nature to persuade, coax, temporise; but just because he was placed by chance in a dilemma for which he was not fitted, he was not true to himself—his genial, gracious, pliable self—but behaved like an entirely different person. Irascible, obstinate, stern, Mr. Whitelock might well wonder what had bewitched the foremost, and hitherto suavest, of his parishioners.

It was a bitter day for all in that once peaceful Suffolk village, alike for rich and poor, lofty and insignificant. But the misfortune of others seldom comes without some abatement, in the shape of self-congratulation to ourselves. Carew could not help feeling, in the midst of his agonized distraction, how good and sweet it was to have Ingaretha leaning on him now. The rector, though sincerely grieved for the beautiful white lamb that had gone astray to her sorrow, was heartily glad at the just punishment inflicted upon wrong-doing. Ghenilda, who, in spite of her warm and outspoken admiration for René, had never from her heart acquiesced in the ill-starred betrothal, was already saying to herself that Providence has worked ill that good may come; Ingaretha might yet be happy; and unequal marriages are always miserable. All is for the best.

Poor heart-sick, soul-sick Ingaretha, pil-
lowed in tear-wet golden hair, knew that only Euphrosyne sorrowed as she sorrowed, and dared not ask for her yet. Thus passed this woeful wedding-day.



PART XII.

CHAPTER LIV.—REST!



TRAGEDY very little affects ordinary minds; and after the first spasm of horror had passed away, the neighbourhood woke up with alacrity to the unwonted, all-delicious bliss of a thorough piece of sensationalism. Now came into full play those petty,

prying instincts of human nature which flock about an unpleasant thing, like the eagles that gather round the carcase. The appalling crime and the noble grief, with all their meanings, were lost sight of; bitter feelings were absorbed in consideration of the thousand and one minutiae connected with death or burial. Would Ingaretha put on black, and if so, what kind of black? These, and hundreds of other questions, the good people of Culpho and Peasemarsch asked themselves impatiently, catching hold of any rumour with unhealthy appetites. Not a yard of crape or a pair of black gloves could have been smuggled into the Abbey without the fact becoming instantly known for miles round. If inquisitiveness could be taken as the gauge of public sympathy, Ingaretha was surely the most beloved and pitied of any lady in misfortune.

And there were not wanting demonstrations of a kindlier nature. Besides the outpourings of real affection, such as that of Amy Greenfield and her children, and Mrs. Minifie, came little tokens of brotherly, sisterly feeling, alike from rich and poor. Flowers were left at the Abbey all day long, modest posies plucked by village children in cornfield and wood, and costly bouquets of exotics; and with both friendly messages and inquiries. Poor, pale, heart-broken Ingaretha had no smile to give in return for these peace-offerings. "Why should they not have shown

René a little kindness?" she said. "It cannot do me any good now."

Why describe a day of complete mourning?—why paint hours of unmixed pain and unassuaged misery from sunrise till nightfall? We all know well enough what such days and such hours are like, and need no reminder of them beyond the whitened hairs and deep lines they have left behind. Are we better or worse for the griefs that have no consolation? God in heaven only knows. His stricken creatures would fain not doubt.

Early that dreaded morning Euphrosyne had flown to Ingaretha's arms. The old woman and the girl were brought as near to each other then as if they had been descended of the same stock, begotten of the same parent. Ingaretha only remembered what Euphrosyne suffered. Some recording angel seemed to have blotted out the sin. Long they wept together without a word.

"How pale you have grown in these last few days!" at last Euphrosyne said. "You must not weep too much now."

"Why not?" asked Ingaretha. "If I am pale, there is nobody to grieve about it since René is gone. I shall soon be old and ugly, and die. I can't eat. I lie awake or dream horrors all the night. The summer air seems stifling. Oh! who can comfort me?"

Then she threw her arms about Euphrosyne's neck and moaned like a sick child.

"You must go away from this place; you will feel differently in another atmosphere," Euphrosyne said cheerfully. "At your age one can never say, 'All is lost.'"

"Lady Micheldever means to take me to the East, I think," Ingaretha answered, still resting her head on her friend's breast. "But I cannot go without you—I will not."

Euphrosyne made no answer, but kissed the pale cheek with passionate emotion.

"Promise that you will not forsake me," Ingaretha said persistently.

"We must wait a little," Euphrosyne answered. "Perhaps it will be best for you to see no one who reminds you so nearly of the beloved ones lost to us. For a time I think you ought to travel with Lady Micheldever, and leave us here—" she corrected herself, adding, "anywhere—away from you."

But Ingaretha persisted. They, too, could console each other a little, perhaps. They must not part yet. And then, by-and-by, Euphrosyne and Maddo must settle their

plans, so as to be near her always. But no talk of plans just yet, only to get away as fast and as far as possible!

Just then Ghénilda came in and asked if Carew might speak to Ingaretha for a moment. She assented, and the four met, for the first time since he had received their congratulations as poet and master of the ceremonies nearly a week, nay, surely an age ago. To-day he was again master of the ceremonies, but of what a different kind!

They shook hands and sat down, all three looking on the ground, one was no sadder than the other. Carew, who had been quite calm a minute before, was overcome at the sight of Ingaretha's black dress and pale face. After a long silence he rose and said,—

"I must not stay, it is time to set out. Maddio is waiting. Have you anything to say to me before I go?"

"No—yes," said Ingaretha; then rising with a sob in her throat, "Yes," she repeated, and snatching up a pair of scissors that Euphrosyne had been using for garlands, cut off a long thick lock of her beautiful hair. "That is for René's grave—you understand. God bless you," she said, turning her face away.

"It shall be as you say," he answered.

Then he went, and they heard the low grating sound of wheels on the gravel path underneath. Ghénilda came to try to comfort them. Amy, too, was in the house, and Bina, ever anxious to play the part of a good little fairy to her adored Ingaretha. The hours passed somehow. When the carriages came back, and she knew that all was over, Ingaretha hid herself from the others, and went out of doors. All the morning she had been pining for solitude. Not the kindest of kindly looks, not the tenderest of tender words, but had driven her almost crazy with a sense of their impotence. What were caresses, looks, words? Who or what could console this poor, half-maddened, desolate thing called Ingaretha? Could Nature? Could the great all-prevailing spirit called God? Could the Christ, to whom miserable men and women had throughout ages fled for healing? She sat down in a solitary spot and wept abundantly. Did any comfort come? She knew not, but when she had done crying the whole aspect of the day had changed. A shadow had fallen over the noontide glory of the day, the mocking triumphant singing of the wind had ceased, and the noisy chorus of throstles and linnets; instead came little rippling sounds of sootiest breezes, amid birch and abele, and the plaintive note of solitary stockdove.

How placid it was, how gracious, how lovely! When the park ended, the pastures began, and what pastures! The happy cows stood knee-deep in the warm grass, or eyed themselves meditatively in the clear little river. The silvery grey mallards waved gently to and fro. Far away the same picture—grazing cows, and clear shadows, and silvery mallards—was repeated in miniature. There was nothing else to be seen, except the sky, in which shifted a few bright clouds. Ingaretha threw aside her hat, and rested her head on a knoll of turf, thinking all the time of new-made graves in her own churchyard. The two friends lying there had been her heroes. Sooner or later she felt sure that the world would have recognised their grand qualities, and now they were dead, and their chances of glory with them. She had never doubted of René's great future. He possessed moral and intellectual qualities which the other lacked—self-denial, a practical turn of mind, pride, discretion, insight into the characters of men. There was in the complexion of his being something that took stronger hold of the thoughtful and the truth-seeking than the dazzling fascinations of Monsieur Sylvestre, something not wholly moral, not wholly intellectual, but made up of both, and heightened by a daring, uncompromising temper.

If he could only have lived in the beautiful world a little longer, and unlearned that cynicism for which she had so often chidden him! What had his thirty years brought? Alas, nothing but want and disappointment, and the frustration of ideals and hopes. And just when her whole life had been so planned as to make his own perfect, came this cruel ending. The old rage came back, the old horror, the old longing for retribution; but for a moment only. These poor besotted Suffolk labourers were not his fate; they had but accomplished blindly an inevitable consequence. René and Monsieur Sylvestre were not of this world; they were purer, better, loftier than the best of their fellows, and it was of such stuff that martyrs were always made, whether of faith, of progress, or of doubt. But where were they? What meant this impenetrable darkness and silence that hindered their spirits from communing with her own? Would such separation last throughout life? And after?

She bowed her head, praying, almost involuntarily, that it might not be as she had sometimes feared, that the heavenly world to come and life everlasting might be as true as the golden age upon earth, in which she had never doubted. Only a little hope to hold



"SHE SAT DOWN IN A SOLITARY SPOT."

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her on, a little courage to live, a little faith to guide her ; she asked for nothing more.

CHAPTER LV.—A CONSPIRACY.

THAT same afternoon Maddio and Euphrosyne set out on foot for Pilgrim's Hatch. They had never talked of familiar things since the dread events of a week ago. Now their hearts were full to overflowing, and as they sauntered along under the shade, their tongues were unloosed. Both had wept till they could weep no longer. Calmly and without break they began to speak of the future.

"What do you mean to do, little mother?" asked Maddio. "Our poor dwelling is nearly destroyed, our stores consumed, our purses empty. Unless some great piece of good luck happens to us, we can never get on our legs again. And then, how can we feel safe in this place any more? The people are as ferocious as the Bedouin."

"Dear Maddio, listen to me," Euphrosyne said, talking coaxingly, as if to a six-year-old school-boy. "I have much to say to you, and I know you will be patient and yielding. Promise me that you will do all I require of you."

"Of course, you know best, being a woman, and for years the adviser of our beloved father and teacher," Maddio answered with emotion. "Only speak, dear mother."

"Well, to begin at the beginning—alas, my poor head is so sadly confused, that I hardly see any beginning or any end. I fear my wits are going, and what would become of you then?" answered Euphrosyne, putting her hand to her brow. "But I must begin somewhere, and it shall be with our plans. We will leave this sweet, but for us ill-omened, place at once and for ever. Let us go to-morrow."

"So soon?"

"And why not? We can bring no comfort to the living, and the dead need us not. Let us go to-morrow."

"As you think best," Maddio said reluctantly ; for the poor man could not contemplate losing the flesh-pots of Egypt without a pang.

"Dear brother, only think a moment, and you will see that we ought to do it. Our Ingaretha's heart is well-nigh broken by these miseries, and all that her friends can do is to put out of sight the reminders of them. We cannot console—at least, let us not trouble that sweet child any more."

"But who will take care of her when we are gone?"

"Oh! what kind of care was ours?"

During the year we have spent in England, anxiety after anxiety, sorrow after sorrow, has been heaped upon her head, till her cup of endurance is filled to the brim. The longer we stay, the more she will have to bear."

Maddio made no answer. Even the events of the last few days had failed to damp the childish ardour of his nature. He could not help thinking that after a time the wounds would be healed, and life would smile afresh.

"I have thought of a plan for sparing her," pursued Euphrosyne, looking older and grayer and more like a ghost of her former self, with very sorrowful mood ; "we will go secretly, and without a word of farewell."

Maddio started as if stung.

"Listen, dear brother. Though we sleep to-night under Ingaretha's roof, we can get away unknown to her. The men, fortunately, are in a different wing of the house, and the servants sleep so late in the morning that there is no fear of being discovered. We can slip out at night, and get the early morning mail to London, and once there are placed out of every one's reach."

"True enough," Maddio answered ruefully.

"In London we will stay a few days, till all search for us shall be over, and then form our future plans," pursued Euphrosyne with feverish eagerness. "I think we had better go to the Far West. We have one good comrade there—you remember the Alsatian Sigbert, who was once with us in Algérie—he would surely be kind to us. Or we could settle down in some friendly little town in Alsatia. I could earn my bread by teaching ; you could do it also, and even Aglaë might do something—"

"Would Aglaë go with us?" asked Maddio, brightening.

"Maddio," Euphrosyne said, stopping short, and looking at him with an expression of solemn appeal, "I have something to tell you about that young stranger which you must never divulge to any living soul. She is my own child, born of that first neglected, unhappy marriage of which you have heard me often speak. By some strange chance she was led here, herself an unhappy, neglected wife, the victim of a narrow, unsatisfying existence. But, as yet, I have not made myself known to her. I think I should always have kept silence, had not two things happened—"

She stopped short, wiped away two big tears, and added :—

"My husband never knew, for I felt all along that I ought to reconcile her with her own people and persuade her to go home ;

and I knew that, being fond of Aglaë, and interested in her, as he was, he would have felt all the more sorry to part with her had he known all. But a little before my dear saint died, Aglaë, too, became a widow, and was thus free to choose her own career. Hitherto we have not yet talked of the future, but this very day I am going to tell her all, and she shall do as she likes."

"Of course she will go," Maddio said, growing more and more cheerful; "and why should we not found another Pilgrim's Hatch in the New World? Let us go to Central America. The climate is perfect. The natives are kindly disposed to Europeans. The flora and fauna are beautiful and varied. Dear mother, I am ready to go this very moment."

"As full of hope as ever!" Euphrosyne said with a mournful smile, "whilst I long for nothing else but to lie down by my husband's side. Alas! dear Maddio, I have no courage to clear, plant, dig, and build afresh. To obtain a shelter and food is all I seek, and it may be to do a little good to my suffering fellows. Were Aglaë willing I would join one of the sisterhoods whose mission it is to nurse the sick. It is a practical scheme, and oh! how tired I am of dreams! We shall see. But what hinders thee from going whithersoever thou wilt? It would be hard to part, but we should love each other all the same."

"No, I will never forsake thee," said Maddio fervently; "never, whilst I live. Do not speak of what is impossible."

"Let us set out this very night, then—without bidding any one adieu—except the dead," Euphrosyne said eagerly. "We have money enough to carry us a little way. Aglaë is not penniless. We must trust to heaven for the rest."

Silently and sorrowfully they made the round of their so late happy home, gathering a flower here, dropping a tear there, lingering long in the haunts they had loved best. The afternoon was perfect; radiant, glowing, balmy. And when the purple and gold died out of the sky, a soft haze settled upon the place, subduing the summer landscape to the complexion of their thoughts.

"It is as if the spirit of our beloved master spoke to us and compelled us," Maddio said in a low voice. "Never in my life did I feel so assured of the immortality of the soul as I do at this instant. Dearest mother, believe with me that our adored friends have still part in the activity and love of the universe."

"I will try," said the poor woman meekly.

Long they remained standing at the gate, not able to tear themselves away from the scene of such mingled enjoyment and hope, foreboding and despair. Not an inch of ground before them but had been hallowed by affection, beautified by the graces of daily life, desecrated by hate! They were turning their faces towards a new home and another life; but they knew that they should never find any home very dear, or life very sweet now. Their adored master, their beloved comrade, were gone, and with these two was lost to them what had been more precious than life itself.

Without a word they returned to the Abbey. On their way they met two or three of the village folks, who slunk past in silence. Had they followed the instinct of the moment, they would have gone up to Madame Sylvestre and said—"Poor thing, we are sorry for your misfortunes and our own. You have always been a good friend to us. God bless you!" But pride and sullenness kept them silent, and years after they were sorry.

It was the last ever seen of those two pathetic figures in the village.

Early next morning news was spread abroad of their mysterious departure. They had fled, leaving no trace behind, and with them the young Frenchwoman, for whom Madame Sylvestre had shown such strange tenderness. And years after, when the agony of that stormy time had passed away, the remembrance of Euphrosyne and Maddio was cherished among the country-people. They felt that they had been more sinned against than sinning, and the sayings of these gentle souls, their deeds of Christian charity, and their sufferings, were wept over as if nothing had marred the harmony of their intercourse. There was in the teaching of Euphrosyne and her companions an almost divine pitifulness, that made them feel sure of being forgiven for the direst offence of their lives.

CHAPTER LVL.—FAREWELLS.

RUMOUR said that Ingaretha was about to fit also, and many signs portended a long absence. Packing up was going on all day long at the Abbey. Several servants were to accompany their mistress. Mr. Minifie, moreover, was dismissed, and a new agent—reported to have liberal views—took his place. Miss Meadowcourt was going to the East with Lady Micheldever, people said, and none knew when she would come back again. Visits of condolence had already been paid, and now friends and neighbours flocked to say farewell. Ghonilda

received most of them, but there were one or two Ingaretha would not treat so cavalierly. Mr. Whitelock, for instance, who had many things to say to her.

Touched by her pallor, her sadness, and her black dress, he began with a fervent "God bless you!" and sat down, not knowing what to say next.

Ingaretha made a great effort to be cheerful.

"You will have heard my plans," she said; "we start to-morrow for Malta, and from thence to the East, where Lord Micheldever is to meet us. I do not intend to return home for several years."

"I am sorry to hear you say that," Mr. Whitelock answered, "sorry for all our sakes, though glad for your own. I can but hope that change of air and scene will mitigate the painfulness of these unhappy, though not wholly unforeseen events. May it be God's will that great good may come out of much apparent evil."

Ingaretha had determined not to take offence, let the rector say what he might. She held her peace, and he continued:—"Of death, how seldom it happens that one can say, 'Thou hast come too soon!' Your friends, whatever might have been their mental gifts, lacked the faculty of discretion, and took no account of the realities lying around them. Can aught of good issue from the schemes of those who live without God in the world? My dear Miss Meadowcourt, pray pardon me for speaking so plainly to you, but we are old friends, and I cannot believe that plain speaking amongst old friends is ever a real harm. And now we have to think of those through whom offence hath come. There is naturally great distress among my poor people, and great dread of the punishment that may fall upon the wrong-doers."

"I hope the law will deal gently with them," Ingaretha said. "I have talked with my guardian, Mr. Mede, about it, and he seemed to think that it was sure to be so."

The rector shook his head: "Perhaps no heavier verdict will be awarded than manslaughter against the ring-laders, who will be sentenced to several years' transportation. Lesser punishments will surely be inflicted upon two or three foolish lads whose misfortune it was to have been besotted with drink in honour of your wedding—"

Ingaretha's cheeks flushed with indignation.

"Nay," she answered quickly, "none of the village-folks went away drunk from the Abbey. It was no fault of mine that they

afterwards flocked to the ale-house, and gave way to excesses."

"Be that as it may," pursued the rector, "they got maddened with drink and acted like madmen. But who can doubt that, all things considered, their punishments will be far greater than they deserve? These misguided plough-boys belong, in almost every case, to honest, hard-working, church-going families, and the lightest sentence the law can inflict will bring sorrow, and shame, and desolation to a hundred hearts. A few months' imprisonment may seem little to us. Think of what it is to them! The very fact of being tried at the assizes brands their brow with an ineffaceable mark of disgrace. Babes now sucking at the breast will learn to point their fingers in scorn at this or that fellow-parishioner; little children at the Sunday-school will be ashamed of their fathers and brothers; family will be set against family in never-ending feuds, which vainly may I, or my successor when I am gone, try to heal. My heart is well-nigh broken at the sorrows of my flock."

His lip quivered, his eyes filled, and Ingaretha too was greatly moved. She held out both her hands to her friend. They wept together. All grievances were forgotten in that incomparable reconciliation.

"Oh!" she cried with great emotion, "what can I do? What can any one do to make things better? I would willingly give up the greater part of my fortune to buy back the peace of the old times. But what are words?"

"My dear friend," answered the rector, wiping away his tears, "that my prayers have been offered for you night and day during the past weeks, I need not say. But, by the light of our own poor, unassisted reason, we may perhaps arrive at some conclusions not wholly without service in this emergency. In the first place, have you taken any steps towards providing these unfortunate people with counsel?"

"Mr. Mede would not hear of such a thing. He said that the law must take its course."

"And what does Mr. Carew say?" asked the rector. "I have, unfortunately, no influence over him, and on more than one occasion lately we have vexatiously differed on several points. Still, Mr. Carew is a kind-hearted man, and would be likely to take quite an opposite view to that of a cut-and-dry lawyer."

"Mr. Carew promised to provide the counsel himself. He is very kind."

"He is, indeed," answered the rector. "I see Mr. Carew's faults as clearly as any one. But the sweetness of his temper—except when he is defending your friends—atonies, one might almost say, for all. Dear me, that is really generous of him!" And the rector seemed on the verge of falling into a reverie.

"What else can we do?" asked Ingaretha.

"You are quite right to keep me to the point, Miss Meadowcourt. What else can we do? There are the families of the convicted to think of. Dick Smithson, who seems to have been the ringleader, supports his widowed mother and two younger children. Maple—as you know, never a very sober fellow—has a wife dependent upon him and a large young family. If any are convicted of manslaughter, it will be these two."

"Of course the women and children must not suffer. I am ready to leave with you any amount of money you think proper and necessary. Will you administer it, Mr. Whitelock?"

"I cannot refuse such a request," answered the rector graciously; "and you may rely upon my economy and discretion. There will be the children to send to school."

"Let everything be done that is necessary," Ingaretha said, unwilling to waste time in details. "How little I can ever do for them or anybody now! I have lost all heart. I feel as if I should never have courage to come home again."

"In time this feeling will pass away," the rector said encouragingly. "Dear friend, I can but hope that you are destined to work much good in your native place still, though without doubt after a different fashion. I have watched your career for the last few months with mingled feelings of admiration, pain, and amazement. Were those admirable qualities of intellect and character you have so amply displayed in what you must forgive me for calling a bad cause, placed at the disposal of a conservative party, it would be enormously strengthened for all good purposes. We live in a time of dissension and dismemberment. He who is not with us at the present day, is doubly thereby against us. May I hope that when you return to England riper in experience, sobered in judgment, and having grown in grace as well as in years, you will no longer stand aloof from those who have never ceased to need and regret you? Well, one may say too much when the heart is full. Forgive and forget what has pained you in this or any

other conversation with me; remember only the kind wishes and sincere aspirations of your true friend and faithful pastor."

He rose to go. She held out both hands to him. They said good-bye, and then he went away, wiping his eye. Never in the course of his existence had the good rector felt so sad, so humble, so melancholy. Ingaretha gone, all the brightness of the world seemed gone. He wished that they had never pained each other.

The next person admitted to an interview was Mrs. Minifie.

"Oh dear!" said Mrs. Minifie. "Who'd have thought that in the midst of all this trouble I should have the one wish of my heart gratified? My dear Miss Meadowcourt, I should never have stayed so long in this miserable world but for the hope of seeing my husband meet with his deserts! And he has done so now, and no mistake. Your dismissal will make people wonder where their wits have been to let a wolf go about in sheep's clothing so long."

"I don't look upon Mr. Minifie exactly as a wolf in sheep's clothing," Ingaretha said with a faint smile. "We have never been able to agree about important things, so that it was much better to part before coming to a downright quarrel. That is all."

Mrs. Minifie shook her head.

"Not quite all, I think; of course, I can say what I like of my own husband, and between ourselves, dear Miss Meadowcourt, he is to blame for much of the bad feeling against poor dear Monsieur Sylvestre, and——"

"Do not let us talk of it," Ingaretha said quickly. "How good you have been to poor Euphrosyne, and how grateful she was! Oh! Mrs. Minifie, nothing is yet heard of her. I cannot tell you how uneasy their mysterious silence makes me. They may be starving."

"Madame Sylvestre won't starve, God bless her!" Mrs. Minifie said with cheerfulness. "If there's a penny to be earned, by hook or crook, she'll turn to and earn it, were the trade as new to her as steeple-chasing to a sailor. Maddy might, poor innocent, but then who's better off than a fool with a woman to look after him?"

"True, true," Ingaretha answered absently. "I understand why they are silent. Madame Sylvestre is as proud as a queen, and cannot endure the thought of receiving further help from her friends. She could do it for her husband, but not for herself."

"What a blessing to be relieved of such a helpless creature!" was on Mrs. Minifie's lips.

She checked herself, however, and said, "Well, one never knows how people will take things. Now, if it pleased God to make me a widow, I should feel twenty years younger. But then Madame Sylvestre never saw faults in anybody, least of all in her husband."

"What faults, indeed, had he?" said Ingaretha, speaking more to herself than her companion.

"As far as I can make out, only one, but that a mighty inconvenient one. He never could see straight before him. Whether the mischief lay in his eyes or his brain, or the way in which his head was set on his shoulders, I don't know; but it is certain he was always thousands of miles or hundreds of years away from the matter in hand. Why, you couldn't turn out a decent apple-dumpling under those conditions."

"I suppose, when I have lived a few years longer, I shall judge him as the rest of the world does," Ingaretha answered ruefully; "but I know I shall always love him."

"What has love to do with such faults as his?" Mrs. Minifie said. "You can forgive anything in a man who has the disposition of an angel."

"True; it is so."

"Now, with my husband it is different," began Mrs. Minifie; but Ingaretha had no wish to hear a tirade against Mr. Minifie.

"Shall we take a turn in the garden, or look at the greenhouse?" she asked.

Ingaretha fetched hat, basket, and scissors, and they went; the scissors were used so recklessly that soon the basket was full; roses, Japanese lilies, grapes, peaches, and plums, lay heaped together in gorgeous confusion.

"Think of all these beautiful things wasted whilst you are gone!" Mrs. Minifie said, sighing.

"Why need they be wasted?" asked Ingaretha, and ere the words were fairly uttered there was the clamour of five little voices, and the tread of five pair of little feet.

It was the creature's children come to bid their adored Ingaretha good-bye. Amy had brought them dressed in their best, and each brought some tiny parting gift—a flower, a home-made pincushion, a pair of mittens, even baby presented an apple.

After a long, happy hour in the garden, Amy said they must go. The little ones looked at mother, brother, and sister, wondering who would begin to cry soonest, and at the first sign of moisture in Amy's eyes all burst into loud sobs. Pennie and the two youngest children clung to Ingaretha's skirts.

Bina and Sammie each held one of her hands, fondling it with tears and kisses. Ingaretha's self-possession forsook her, and even Mrs. Minifie betrayed emotion.

At last it was over. Ingaretha, left alone, went indoors, and walked about her haunted rooms with a pale, dreamy face.

She felt that an era of her life had ended. The story was told, the dream was over. The vision passed away. She could not look towards the future with hope, nor could she quite despair. But for a time, at least, she had done with tears.

CHAPTER LVII.—GREETINGS: FIVE YEARS AFTER.

It was Midsummer-day, and alone in her rose-garden wandered, dreaming, the Lady of the Abbey. Was this stately creature indeed the Ingaretha of old? Had Time so enlarged the girlish figure, so ennobled the candid brow, so subdued the playful smile? Golden-haired, fair-complexioned, sweet to look upon as ever, still she was greatly changed. The maiden had grown into a woman, and the womanhood was grand and calm and beautiful.

She had only just returned to England after five years of foreign travel, and to-day for the first time had put aside her mourning. Again and again Ghenilda would coax her to put on a coloured dress, and again and again she had refused. "What does it matter whether I wear black or not?" she used to say impatiently, and nothing Ghenilda urged in reply could persuade her to swerve from this determination. But on returning home her mind wholly changed. Those long years of sorrow and isolation had also been years of self-questioning and inward conflict. She said to herself that sooner or later the effort must be made, and the life in England must be begun afresh, though for months and months she could not summon resolution enough to say, "I will begin to-morrow." At last it was done. She had wrenched herself by a violent effort from an indolent surrender of individuality and never-tiring enjoyment of æsthetic impressions. She had returned to England to gather up the broken threads of neglected duties, and weave them, it might be, into something tangible and good.

Such a return home could not but be dreary. For the first time the truth dawned upon her that she had parted with her youth. Her brow was still smooth; there was no streak of silver in all the gold of her hair; her limbs were full of vigour and elasticity; yet she had

parted with her youth, and with it that intoxicating enthusiasm, that enthralling hope, that unbounded faith, which are indeed not of youth only, but youth itself.

And what had she gained? A little more clearness of vision, a little more humility, a little more reverence, a little more steadfastness. She asked herself the question many times, but as yet the answer had not come.

Another question she asked herself often, and that was also unanswered: What should she do with her life?

The past had taught her many things, but it had not taught her this. From whence would the teaching come?

All these thoughts passed lightly across her mind as she wandered about her garden this rose-crowned, joyous June day. The old Abbey seemed to smile greyly down upon its owner. The happy summer winds were singing a pensive welcome in the trees. The little river rippled with a caressing, enticing sound. Her heart grew lighter as the hours wore on. She sat down by the river-side singing to herself.

On a sudden the inner gate clicked. Looking up, she saw Carew. She had expected him, and rose with outstretched hands.

There was such an affectionate candour and ease about this meeting, that at the first glance a stranger might have said they were brother and sister. But when the greeting was over, and the two sat down side by side, it was not so. They talked carelessly, almost absently, of far-off, unfamiliar things; or if they touched upon the near and the cherished, it was after the fashion of swallows skimming a pool. Again and again he was fain to talk of herself and the past they had lived together; again and again she found herself approaching upon those inner experiences that had made them the true friends they were, and even the surface was stirred lightly, and the depths left untouched.

The poet never grows old, and Carew looked the same as he had done five years ago. His eyes—true poet's eyes—were irradiated ever and anon as he spoke with some exquisite thought or some happy emotion; his voice, musical as the sound of waves upon a summer's night, was clear and soft as of old; his smile had no look of age in it; sportive one moment, grave the next, alive to every passing impression of grace and loveliness; his was indeed the temper over which Time in vain seeks to assert sway. Looking at him, Ingaretha was half disposed to envy that happy unconsciousness, that

winning trustfulness, that fascinating quality of enthusiasm, by which life is made a never-ceasing enchantment. He, on his part, was saying to himself the while he talked lightly of books and art—"What am I beside this noble, self-contained, large-natured creature? Alas! a dawdler, a dreamer, a half-poet, and nothing more!"

Thus they sat, side by side, each little divining the other's thoughts. It was nearly five years since they had parted, and during that time many things had happened, of which they chatted carelessly, now and then dropping unawares into some deeper channel.

"You are going to spend some time here, I believe?" Carew said.

"Yes," she answered.

"And so am I."

Then both fled from the welcome topic like birds coquetting over the spot where they have selected to build.

"Have you heard any news of Madame Sylvestre?" asked Carew after a long pause.

"Ah! I have so much to tell you about her," Ingaretha answered gratefully. "You remember that we—that is, Ghenilda and I—found them—the three, Euphrosyne, Maddio, and Aglaë—living in a little village of Alsace. Madame Sylvestre had opened a school for very little children, Maddio cultivated a garden, Aglaë was the dancing-mistress of the place, their little home was peaceful, and I might say happy. You can imagine what our meeting was like. How joyful, how sad, how full of emotion! Euphrosyne showed me very proudly a little sum of money she had laid by for old age; perhaps eight pounds in all; and I think I never saw her so contented with herself. But we wrote all this to you when you were wandering about—I think in the rose-gardens of Cashmere," she said with a smile.

"Do go on. You did not tell me half enough. You don't know how I have looked forward to your narrative."

"How can I go on?" she said, her face suddenly overshadowed by an expression of pain. "We had hardly reached England when the war broke out. They lost their little all—house, garden, furniture—and had to fly. We next heard of them, with the red cross on their arms, following the English ambulance. They were foremost in the battle-field, and seemed to have enchanted lives. It was grand! But when all was over, and peace was made, they had no heart to begin life afresh. Maddio submitted to be separated from them, and set out alone to join some old comrade in the Far West. Euphrosyne

and Aglaë have joined a Protestant sisterhood. That is the end of their story."

"It might have been sadder," Carew said.

There was another long pause; then he made one more effort to carry on the conversation.

"And the village folks?" he asked. "Have you had time to see any one here?"

Her face brightened.

"I have seen Amy and her children—all grown big children now, and so radiant! Did I ever tell you that a year ago I was enabled to present Mr. Greenfield with a

living?—worth only five hundred pounds a year, with a house, garden, and two acres of glebe, but wealth to them. I don't think there are happier people under the sun. The children get good food and clothes and education. The curate—now the rector—holds up his head. There is nothing they desire now but to be useful."

"You did not tell me that. How glad I am! And the poor people?"

"The two who were convicted of manslaughter—you know why—are just out of prison. I hope now that all things will go



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on smoothly in the old place. At any rate, it will not be my fault if it should be otherwise."

"And the good rector—Mr. Whitelock? You must forgive my curiosity. Remember that I have come straight from Constantinople, and during my travels had no news except what I gained from yourself and Ghenilda."

"Mr. Whitelock is married to the young lady who admired him, and made black-currant jam for him in the old days. He was here yesterday with his bride."

Again there was a long pause.

Ingaretha knew well enough why Carew stayed so long, and what he wanted to say before he went; and sad one moment, gay the next, capricious all the time, she would fain have had him go without a word. The spirit of the past seemed to hold her back, whispering pensively, "Forsake me not! forsake me not!" The spirit of the future beckoned her onwards with caressing, melodious voice. She felt as if she belonged to two separate existences.

"And now let us talk of ourselves," Carew said at last.

"Oh! why?" she exclaimed, with perverse deprecation. "I told you in my letters how grateful I was for all your kindness, and Ghenilda will bear witness to the statement."

It was an ungracious speech, and Carew resented it as any man must have done. But her lips, not her face, had spoken, and he took heart. There was, moreover, something so enchanting about the presence of this new Ingaretha, an unspeakable sobriety and sweetness, an indefinable witchery, made up half of the trust she had learned to place in him, half of the empire she had chosen to exert over him, that he found her lovelier, sweeter, by far than the old. He felt impelled to exquisite joy and broke—

"If not to-day, then to-morrow; if not to-morrow, the next day," he answered. "I have plenty of patience left."

There was something pathetic in these words, and Ingaretha, blushing, apologised for the incivility of her own speech.

"How childish is this ceremoniousness between us two!" he said. "You know well enough that I did not come here to receive your thanks. You cannot help knowing what I mean when I ask permission to talk of ourselves."

Again she blushed. This time without a word, but she put her hand in his, and he saw that she would never send him away in sorrow any more.

"After all," he went on, with a self-convinced, radiant smile, "there is this to be said in my favour. Circumstances have favoured me. I am your neighbour. Having so many interests and duties in common, I must be a poor creature indeed to be of no use to you."

"As if I were thinking of that now!" she said.

"But I ought to think of it. I ought to ask myself, when I demand so much, what I have to give in return. Ah! there is the subject of our old quarrel, though I don't think we shall ever quarrel any more."

"You have an unfair advantage over me," she replied, with a tone of vexation underlying the sweet arch voice. "I cannot for a moment forget how good you were to us all when I was in trouble."

"What is mere kindness?" Carew asked with bitter impatience. "You have made my life heavenly. Is that no kindness?"

She turned away her face, but, in spite of

the gesture, he knew how pale she had grown, how tearful, how serious! With a great effort, she said at last—

"You have wasted your youth upon me."

"Was it wasted? Oh, no. What I am now I have become by reason of that infinite probation. Could I speak to you frankly, and could I lay bare my heart to you—could I still be your friend, had it been otherwise? Never. Looking back, it seems to me that we were both children when last we talked of familiar things. Since then you have learned to understand me, and I have begun to understand myself."

She smiled gratefully, tearfully. There was no need of words. Her face said that she had learned to understand him of late years.

"How absurd our strife was about art and philanthropy!" he said. "You were often wrong, and I was not always right, when we were younger, dearest."

It was impossible not to smile at his naïve way of putting things. He felt too happy to pick and choose words or phrases. What friendship was sweeter, purer, more tried than theirs? He knew that he might speak freely without giving affront.

Thus, gliding from mood to mood, from joy to melancholy, from tenderness to caprice, they spent the long summer afternoon. Now they talked of serious things in low, memory-freighted voices; now of trifles, sportively and with frequent smile.

At last Carew reluctantly took up hat and stick to go. She walked with him to the little garden-gate. The light of the setting sun still lingered rosy-red about the dense shadows of the park, whilst overhead, floating in rosy clouds, sailed the crescent moon.

All was very still.

"I shall see you to-morrow. What a prophecy of happiness!" he said.

She smiled response to his prophecy and left him, looking back to wave her hand and utter a last adieu. He waited till her hair no longer illumined the dusky twilight, and then walked home, dreaming, under the starry, lucent heavens.

The golden visions of youth and the rapturous dithyrambs of early passion could no longer reach those two tried hearts; but they were filled to overflowing with an exquisite sense of perfect sympathy and unbounded repose.

